

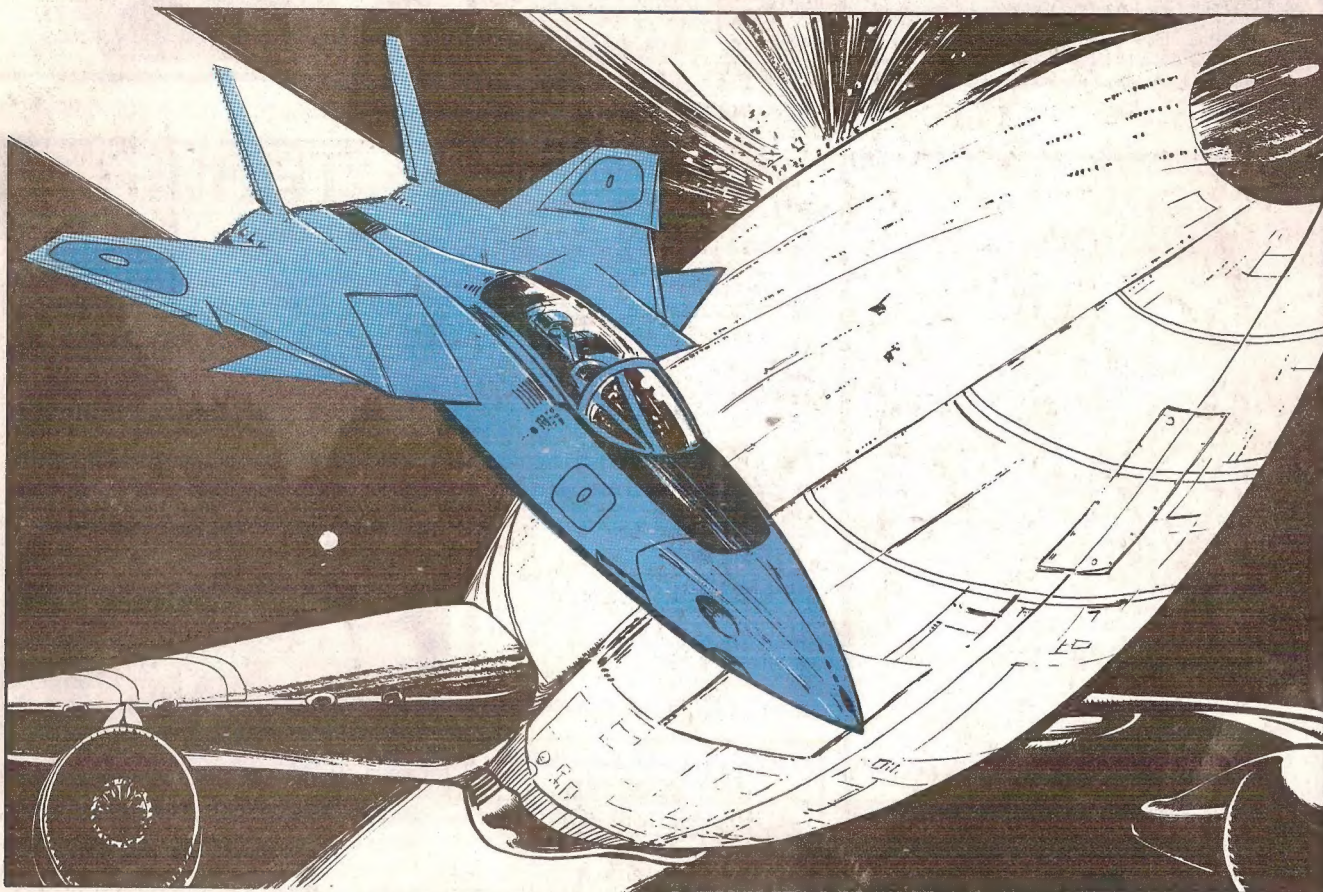
THRUST

SF IN REVIEW

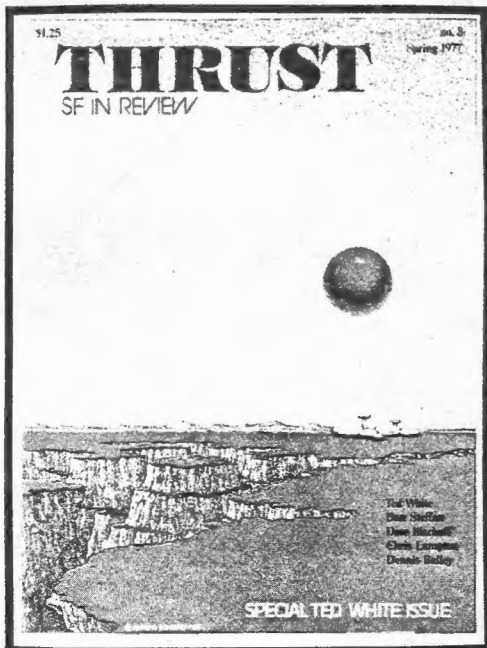
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NORMAN SPINRAD ★ STAR WARS ★ TED WHITE



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staff:

Editor & Publisher: Doug Fratz
 Art Director: Dan Steffan
 Production Assistant: Artie Romero
 Contributing Editors: Ted White, Chris Lampton,
 Dave Bischoff, Melanie Desmond

THRUST - "SF in Review" - Number 2. Thrust is published twice yearly fall and spring, by Thrust Publications, P.O. Box 746, Adelphi, MD 20783. Office of publication: 2008 Erie Street #2, Adelphi, Maryland 20783. Single copies are \$1.50 in the United States and Canada, \$1.50 elsewhere. Subscriptions are 4/\$4.00 in the United States and Canada, and 4/\$5.00 elsewhere. Make all checks payable to Thrust Publications. Wholesale rates and advertising rates are available on request. Print run: 1200. All contents © 1977 Doug Fratz. Contributors retain all further rights.

WHY I AM NOT ANNOUNCING THAT I AM LEAVING SCIENCE FICTION

•Norman Spinrad•

"A working class hero is something to be..."

—John Lennon

What this is supposed to be is more or less of a literary reiteration of a Balticon speech of the same title. "You still have your notes?" sez Doug Fratz. "Oh sure," sez I. In reality, I have never made a prepared speech in my life, and seldom remember exactly what I said afterward, so any resemblance between this non-valedictory essay and the non-valedictory speech of the same title will no doubt be purely psychic.

This, of course, is hardly without precedent. Three well-known science-fiction writers have fairly recently announced that they are leaving science fiction finally and forever. They have made their farewell speeches in various versions at various conventions and one or two of them have published written versions of same — in fanzines, of course. I refer, naturally, to Bob Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, and Barry Malzberg.

Now while these three worthies have been proclaiming their intention to leave science fiction to various science-fiction audiences at some length and for some time, I, on the other hand, might seem to have actually *left* the field, quietly, and without departing fanfare.

I submit that my recent credentials in this regard are far more impressive than those of my "departing" colleagues. My last science-fiction novel, The Iron Dream, was published in 1972; therein I besmirched the sacred Hugo by awarding it to that beloved faanish personality, Adolf Hitler. Aside from the recent publication of "Blackout" in COSMOS and the 1975 publication of "Sierra Maestra" in ANALOG, my stories have not been appearing in the usual magazines for quite some time. I haven't been to a Worldcon since 1972, since then have slunk about only a handful of local cons, and I haven't had so much as a letter in a fanzine since SCIENCE FICTION REVIEW stopped being PSYCHOTIC (if it ever did).

While others have been *talking* about leaving science-fiction....

Or so it would seem.

But things seldom are.

What they seem.

Which is why, under the current circumstances, I feel it necessary to formally announce that I am not announcing that I am leaving science-fiction.

So what *have* I been doing during this hiatus?

Actually, what I've always done, only much more so.

Except for the first three or four years of my career, I've never been a science-fiction writer, which is to say, I've never spent extended periods writing science-fiction exclusively. In the 1967-69 time period, I was writing 5000-6000 word essays every month for KNIGHT magazine on the full spectrum of American society, enough material for a good-sized book, published as Fragments of America. A

couple three tv scripts. A large mainstream novel, The Children of Hamelin, which:

Was serialized in 28 installments in the LOS ANGELES FREE PRESS.

Has never found an American book publisher.

Was bought and paid for by an English publisher but never published by same.

Roughly between 1970 and 1973 I was more or less the chief political columnist for the FREE PRESS. A piece a week. And something north of 100 film reviews during the same period.

I've often been asked how in hell I manage to survive economically as a science-fiction writer doing a novel maybe every couple of years and no more than four or five stories a year. No, I do not have an inheritance. No, I do not deign to work nine-to-fivers. No, I am not a television hack. No, I do not write commercials. No, I do not deal dope.

Admittedly, a partial answer is the large popularity of my science-fiction novels in Europe. But even these continuous and considerable foreign royalties would never have been enough to keep me afloat as a *science-fiction* writer.

I'm a writer.

One of the things I write is science-fiction.

I am not a science-fiction writer.

Since my last published science-fiction novel in 1972, I have:

Written a 250,000 word mainstream novel, Passing Through the Flame, published by Berkley/Putnam.

Done maybe half a book's worth of articles on scientific subjects for ANALOG, NEWSDAY and RUSH.

Scripted one rather loathsome episode of Land of the Lost and a pretty good screen adaptation of Bug Jack Barron which has yet to be produced.

Fairly recently completed another (semi) mainstream novel, The Mind Game, which has yet to find a publisher.

Produced Modern Science Fiction, a history-cum-anthology of the field.

Done one long sf novella, "Riding the Torch," and published a short story collection, No Direction Home.

Had stories in places like PLAYBOY, OUT, and SWANK.

Been in New York learning *mucho* about the great wide wonderful world of mainstream book publishing.

And this week, finished the first draft of a long science-fiction novel, A World Between.

Aha!

Which is why I am announcing that I am not announcing that I am leaving science-fiction. Which is also why I believe that Bob, Harlan, and Barry, would have been wiser to avoid making such unequivocal farewell statements.

Okay, I admit that there *was* a period when I had the urge to nail my feces to the cathedral door and stalk out with a righteous parting shot. Around 1969-1970, in the

white heat of the New Wave-Old Waves *gotterdammerung*, about the time that Bug Jack Barron failed to win either the Hugo or the Nebula.

Now I have been a literary critic, a film critic, and I have written one of the definitive histories of the field. I felt with hot passion then and with analytical detachment now that Bug Jack Barron, in cultural, political, and absolute literary terms is a higher literary achievement than The Left Hand of Darkness. Citations of awards, sales figures or reviews, accusations of hubris, mania, or self-promotion, won't change my mind, so don't bother. And that's not really the point anyway.

The point is that my reaction to losing both the Hugo and the Nebula was not so much anger or despair as incredulity. Fresh from a protracted stay in London, hotbed of New Wave activity, where literary values were taken seriously and seriously applied to science fiction and Mike Moorcock for a time used his Nebula as a doorstop, I felt that I had been slapped across the face with proof positive that what I was trying to do had no place within the science fiction genre. Fuck you! I thought. You won't have me to kick around any more!

But somehow, after I had cooled down, I began to think. Slaughterhouse Five had also been a Hugo and Nebula nominee and it hadn't won anything either, which put me in pretty good company. Pondering that, I realized that, under the polarized circumstances of the New Wave-Old Wave War, I had been incredibly naive to suppose that something like Bug Jack Barron had a chance to win these popularity-contest awards. The whole thing was epitomized for me in a review written by Lester del Rey.

Now Lester was one of the chief Old Wave ideologues at the time, which meant that he was ideologically committed to hating Bug Jack Barron. However, Lester has always been an honest man, and apparently he found to his horror that not only did he more or less like the book but that this major item of "New Wave Nihilism" had a strong positive hero, a black hearted villain, and all the major elements which everyone *knew* the New Wave rejected. It tore his ideological framework to shreds, and he was reduced to a torturous attempt to construct a definition of science fiction as a whole which excluded it.

Well somehow instead of leaving the field in a huff, I started looking at it in absolute analytical terms — social, economic, political, and cultural as well as literary. What made science fiction novels sell was part Jungian imagery, part packaging, part publishing economics, part fan-nish politics, part promotion, and had very little to do with absolute literary values one way or the other.

And the real reasons I was writing science fiction had nothing to do with any of these things.

I was attracted to the total creative freedom inherent in the material itself, and the genre formulas, fannish cults, Hugos, Nebulas, publishers' conceptions of what science fiction was supposed to be, were antithetical to the reason I was writing the writing the stuff in the first place. The enemy of better science fiction was the concept of "science fiction" itself.

So instead of "leaving science fiction," an act which would only have related to all this extraneous apparatus and given it credence, I said to myself, I'm a writer. I write

what I write at any given time for reasons I myself don't really understand or even want to. What I am impelled to write comes from within. I will forget about Nebulas, Hugos, genre formulas, Old Wave, New Wave, science fiction, mainstream, and all the rest of the external apparatus.

I will write what comes to me to write and when I have finished writing it, I will *then* analyze what I have in terms of publishers' categories and rates and sell it for as much money as I can.

Which is what I've been doing ever since.

Which, I believe, is the way Bob and Harlan and Barry should look at it.

Of course many poor benighted science fiction writers dream of the glories of ***Mainstream***. Serious critical attention. Editors obsessed with absolute literary values, not commercial formulas. Instant fame. The Johnny Carson Show. Elbow rubbing with the literary gods of Olympus. Mucho dinero.

Well, I have failed to publish one mainstream novel, published another, and the verdict is not yet in on a third, so I have seen more of the reality of mainstream publishing than most science fiction writers, and what I say to this is, bullshit!

Precisely the same brand of bullshit that one encounters in the world of science fiction publishing, fellas, and at least in equal helpings. Only the economics are somewhat inflated, so that mainstream fiction publishing comes more and more to resemble literary television. Some random quotes:

"There are no middling books, only best-sellers and flops."

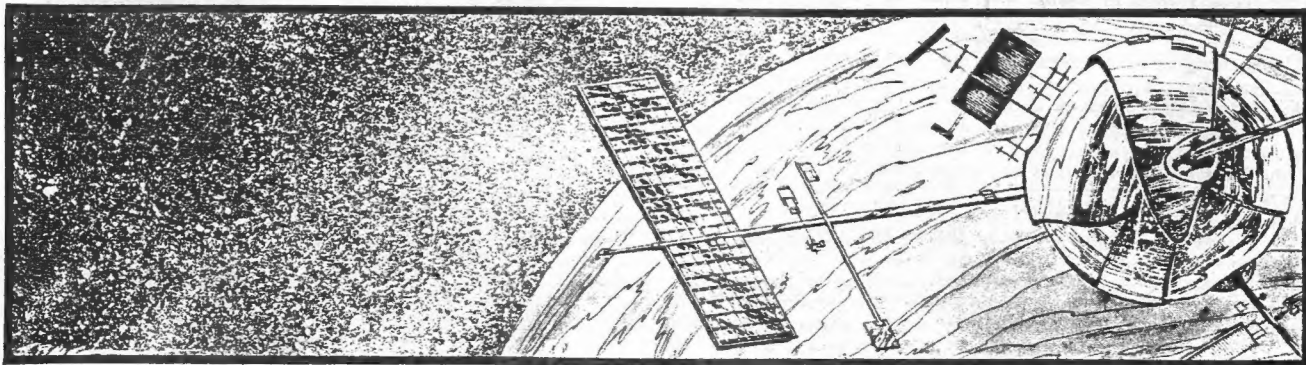
"The typical consumer of fiction is a 35-year-old suburban housewife."

"Novels dealing in any way with the counter-culture or drugs are poison in hard-covers. That's strictly a paperback original market."

Etc., etc., etc.

And why not? The same entertainment conglomerates that dominate film and television are now in the process of gobbling up the publishing industry. Books are not being bought by editors, they are being bought by committees. Accountants, sales executives, and their ilk exercise veto power over all but a handful of the most senior editors. Mainstream publishing has largely been engulfed (& Westernized by the corporate mentality. What counts is not literary quality but the balance sheet. Mainstream book publishing, like television, involves fairly large investments of capital in the product, unlike most science fiction. Best-sellers are made, not born, and for a novel to have any real chance of showing a profit at all, an advertising budget of at least \$25,000 is required. A lousy quarter-page in the NEW YORK TIMES for one day can run \$2000, and that is a mere token which sells nothing. To bring out a major league mainstream novel means a six-figure investment, and that doesn't even count the author's advance.

Well, if cop shows are topping the Nielsens, the networks are going to be buying cop shows next season, and if demonic possession novels are topping the best-seller lists, the publishers are going to buy demonic possession novels. When corporations are investing heavy bread in new product, prudent, conservative committee decisions dictate close at-



tection to current market trends.

Sure the money is there for writers to make in carload lots, but anyone who thinks he's going to escape from genre restrictions by jumping from science fiction to mainstream is just whistling dixie.

For one thing, the economic distance between a mainstream novel and a *major League* mainstream novel is far greater than the distance between science fiction and mainstream. When I in my naivete was paid a \$10,000 dollar advance for Passing Through the Flame, it was more than double what I had ever been paid for a science fiction novel, and I thought I had lucked into heavy bread. Actually, it was peanuts. Not just because the advance was near the bottom end of the mainstream scale but because a \$10,000 advance almost guarantees a miniscule ad budget by mainstream standards, which virtually guarantees that a book will go nowhere. Publishers reserve their big promotional budgets for novels that have cost them heavy bread in the first place. If you've got a big investment in a novel up front, you've got to protect it by spending *more* big bucks to promote it.

And which mainstream novels get the big bread treatment? The ones that hew closest to the then-current mainstream genre formulas, dummy! Disaster novels. Occult novels. Tales of liberated womanhood. Monster animals. Mainstream publishing is a series of publishing genres, just like science fiction, except the bread is bigger, and the formulas change somewhat more rapidly, and the publishers' perceptions of audience demographics are different.

And even beyond that, there is a New York literary establishment, and it functions all too similarly to science fiction fandom. Major fanzines are THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW and THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF BOOKS. Maybe two or three dozen people consider themselves the True Guardians of the Great Tradition — the Serious Writers and Significant Critics. They decide who is In and Who is Out and of course you have to be one of Us to be In. They have an all-too-familiar lust-envy-contempt-servility relationship to the best-seller writers and the publishing mavens. Fortunately, there aren't enough of them to hold a con.

What I am suggesting is that the conditions that have caused Ellison, Malzberg, and Silverberg to say farewell to science fiction exist out there in the Big World too, and in spades. I've come to believe that the things that are wrong with science fiction — and there are plenty of things wrong — are not endemic to science fiction alone but represent the existential position of the writer of fiction in American society, period.

What can a poor boy do but play in a rock and roll band? Well for me, the answer has long been to write what I please without regard to the genre apparatus of mainstream, science fiction, gothics or nurse novels, all of which are just cogs in the same big machine. To be as totally naive about these commercial realities as I can while I'm writing and then to be as machiavellian, shrewd, and slick as I know how when it's time to confront the commercial interface. As Hemingway said: "When I'm writing, I'm an artist, when I'm finished, I become a son of a bitch."

And so now I'm writing a science fiction novel, and I feel quite good about it. I'm interested in what I'm writing, and I like the way it's turning out. I've got a contract, and a fat advance by science fiction standards — which is small enough by mainstream standards so that the accountants and sales executives won't bug me. And perhaps that is as good a reason to announce that I'm not announcing that I'm leaving science fiction as any. The money is getting better, but the corporate mavens aren't really interested yet, which means that in this cozy little corner, there still remain some editors who care as much about the literature as the balance sheet, and more creative freedom than those who have not encountered the mainstream genre machine might suppose.

Will I continue to write science fiction?

I'll no doubt continue to write things that get published as science fiction.

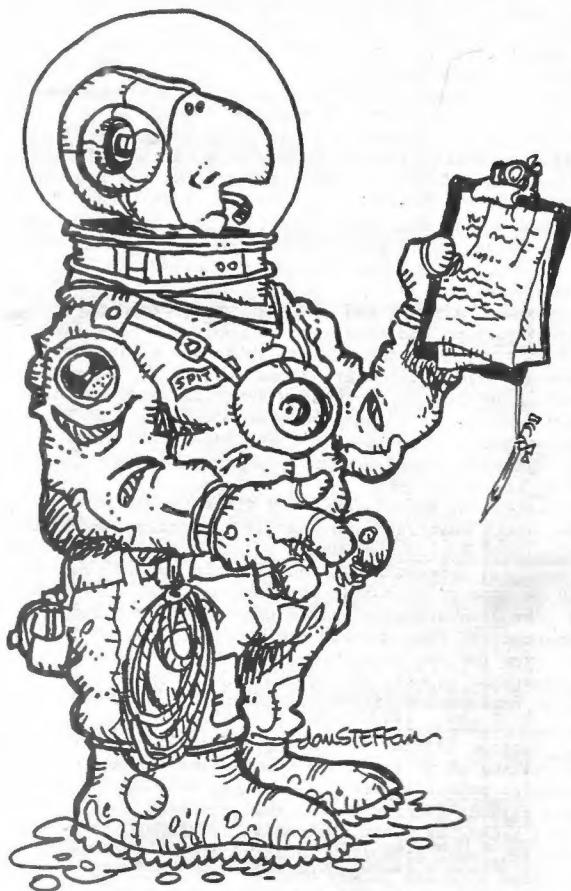
Will I continue to write mainstream?

I'll no doubt continue to write things that get published as mainstream.

Am I then a science fiction writer who dabbles in mainstream or a mainstream writer who occasionally returns to his roots?

Frankly, Scarlett, I don't give a damn.

—Norman Spinrad



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THE NORMAN SPINRAD INTER- VIEW!

by doug fratz



Thrust: How did you start writing science fiction?

Spinrad: I wrote a little bit in junior high school and high school, and then college newspaper stuff. In college I also took a couple of short story courses. For the last assignment in the last course, I wrote a story which was very dirty, and the professor told me that someone who knew what he was doing could sell it to PLAYBOY. He told me about the whole idea of typing these things up and mailing them to magazines. It seemed like a very simple straight forward idea, and I did. I sent it to PLAYBOY. It sold about eight years later to a porny magazine in California. I decided I was going to try and write, so I got a cheap apartment in the East Village, worked for a sandal shop and stuff like that, wrote alot of stories, and after a year, sold a story to Campbell. I sold a few more to him too, got an agent who didn't sell anything.

Thrust: Who was the agent?

Spinrad: Scott Meredith. I ended up working for Scott Meredith so I could be my own agent and get my stories sold.

Thrust: Did you turn to writing science fiction short stories because sf short stories are easier to sell?

Spinrad: No, I didn't know anything about what is easiest to sell. I'd been reading science fiction for a long time, since the age of eleven, when I decided to write it came naturally. I didn't know shit about markets.

Thrust: When did you start meeting other sf writers and begin getting entrenched in the field?

Spinrad: Well, in one way it was when I was at Scott Meredith. They had a list of sf clients as long as your arm and I was corresponding with these people; I was handling Jack Vance, Phil Dick and people like that. Terry Carr worked there at the same time I did, but I had never been to a convention. My first convention was the Cleveland Worldcon in 1966, although my first meeting with other science fiction writers was in 1965 at the

Milford Conference, where I met Damon, Harlan and Keith Laumer.

Thrust: What kind of feedback did you get from Milford?

Spinrad: At that first Milford I had "Neutral Ground" there, which was not terribly favorably received, but not viciously either. It was very useful for me at that stage to meet some science fiction writers and spend ten days rapping and talking. I went there as a kind of an equal, it's not like a Clarion.

Thrust: When did you join SFWA?

Spinrad: I was a charter member. I think, if I remember right, SFWA was being founded at that first Milford.

Thrust: Have you found SFWA useful?

Spinrad: Well, I'm atypical. By the time there was a SFWA, I knew more about marketing and contracts than they did. I had worked as an agent and knew about the market and publishers and what crooks they are. A lot of people got their education at Scott Meredith. Damon worked there, Lester worked there for a while, because if you are a writer and you need the bread, there aren't too many people who will hire you.

Thrust: Then you see SFWA's major purpose as getting younger writers acclimated into the field?

Spinrad: No, I view it as a union, working for newer and established writers in the same way. Like now there's this huge thing where they've sent in a bunch of auditors into Ace Books and they've already kicked loose ten thousand dollars, and there's no end in sight. They really went in there and did a job.

Thrust: Who was handling that?

Spinrad: The actual audit is being handled by a firm of accountants; I think Alexei Panshin started the whole thing. Jerry Pournelle has been in on a lot of this stuff since he was president.

Thrust: What are your views on the revoking of Stanislaw Lem's honorary membership to SFWA?

Spinrad: Unfortunately, I was involved in that stupid thing. George Zebrowski sent a letter around saying wouldn't it be nice to make Stanislaw Lem an honorary member back when I was vice president, and frankly, who gave a damn? So we did, and now all the shit comes down. We shouldn't have made him an honorary member in the first place, there are a million people as least as deserving, but it was a casual thing; no one thought about it twice.

Thrust: I understand the problem started when Ted Cogswell published an article by Lem knocking American sf...

Spinrad: I never read it, but I have read the responses to it. I think it's a bundle of shit either way. I don't think anyone should be kicked out for saying fuck you. He shouldn't have been in in the first place. I don't know what the excitement is about. SCIENCE FICTION STUDIES, I think, is devoting a whole issue to the idiot controversy. It's a waste of time. I don't think we're effecting the course of detente with this.

Thrust: How do you feel about the dropping of the Dramatic Presentations Nebula?

Spinrad: I think it was a stupid mistake. You can vote "no award" if there's nothing good that year. But look at all the good movies being made. You would have a real competition with Star Wars and Demon Seed. I was one of the people who instigated it in the first place. The only problem I can see is getting everyone to see all the movies and stuff. It would be nice if the studios would set up screenings for everyone.

Thrust: But isn't it even harder to get all the members to read all the fiction published each year?

Spinrad: Well, no one ever does, that's laziness. But the dramatic presentations category was loosely drawn, with

records competing with stage plays against television against movies. I ran into Peter Bergman of Firesign Theatre at a party after the Hugo Awards once, and he could do nothing but bitch how he had been screwed out of his Hugo.

Thrust: So some people do care whether they win.

Spinrad: Oh yeah. He was really pissed off, and had all these conspiracy theories about why he was denied the Hugo. People care. Studios don't care.

Thrust: I heard that Woody Allen wasn't overly excited over his award for Sleeper...

Spinrad: Well, no one big has ever showed up. Heston was supposed to accept for Soylent Green, but didn't. Nobody bothered to tell Mel Brooks.

Thrust: Did you like Star Wars?

Spinrad: Yeah, I thought it was fun.

Thrust: Why do you think that Ben Bova came out so hard against the movie?

Spinrad: Ben thought it wasn't serious science fiction. I thought it was good fun, a better movie than 2001, which I loathed.

Thrust: 2001 was edited for obscenity.

Spinrad: Well, I know where the ape sequence and the last sequence came from. Kubrick handed in the movie without them and the studio said Jesus Christ, no beginning, no end, Stanley, eleven million bucks? Go, shoot. Shoot a new opening, shoot some kind of an ending.

Thrust: How successful was your mainstream novel, Passing Through the Flame?

Spinrad: Not very. It's a whole horror story. That book was done for George Ernsberger, who had been my editor at Avon on Bug Jack Barron and The Iron Dream. Everything worked out fine, I finished it and George was pleased. Then in California I get a call from George saying that Walter Minton, the president, owner and head honcho, had unilaterally decided it would be a paperback original. I was extremely pissed off. I told George on a Thursday that it wasn't coming out as a paperback original and I was going to be in Minton's office on Monday morning and I was going to bang his fucking head open and then sue him for ten million dollars. By the time I got to Minton's office, they had decided to do it my way. But they put no bread into it at all. When the paperback came out, George and I had worked out a package based on reviews, but then George left the company before it came out and someone, no one knows or admits whom, substituted the package that appeared, with sentences that don't end--totally illiterate. It was probably instigated by Minton. It did not do so well. But it went through two printings in paperback, so it wasn't a dud.

Thrust: What kind of publicity did Berkley promise you on Passing Through the Flame?

Spinrad: You know, I didn't know shit about mainstream novels, I had a lot of misconceptions, and so did George, really. I knew science fiction, and I assumed that if you had a quarter million word mainstream book they would put some publicity money into it, a first class job. Since then I've learned that to properly publicise a book, you're talking forty to sixty thousand dollars. That book had a three thousand dollar budget, almost all of which went for one lousy quarter page ad in the New York Times. You either have a big book or a flop, there are no middling mainstream novels. I should have held out for forty or fifty thousand dollars for that book to commit the publisher to spend more to make more money. At the time, I thought ten or fifteen thousand was a lot.

Thrust: When do the rights revert back to you?

Spinrad: In five years after publication, if I can prove

the book is out of print. It's very difficult because the publishers have gotten smart, and now they don't list the print run on the royalty statements. Now the only way to prove out of print is with the cooperation of a bookstore.

Thrust: You mean have the bookstore order and be told it's out of print.

Spinrad: That's right. Only way you can do it now.

Thrust: About one third of the way through Bug Jack Barron, I realized that I was picturing Jack Barron as Harlan Ellison. Anything to that?

Spinrad: That's your hangup. It's explicit in the book that he looks like a cross between Bobby Kennedy and Bob Dylan. If there was a model for Barron, it was a combination of Les Crane and Joe Pyne. A combination of Les Crane's social consciousness and Joe Pyne's mouth. But it was all made up.

Thrust: How did you develop the background for the TV studio in Bug Jack Barron and the movie production in Passing Through the Flame?

Spinrad: I've been on TV, but it's science fiction, I made it up. With Passing Through the Flame, I had been in Hollywood for a few years. I also was working for the Free Press out there for a time, so that's where the underground stuff came from.

Thrust: Did you get any complaints from anyone who thought they were in Passing Through the Flame?

Spinrad: No, I haven't spoken to Arthur Konkin, the editor of the Free Press, since then, and Barry Stein was loosely based on him. The other characters are totally made up. In the party scene, there are lots of walk-throughs; you can recognise Harlan, George Clayton Johnson, Jerry Cornelius.

Thrust: Most of your novels have centered around characters who are monumentally charismatic, clever and egotistical and involved in various stupendous power plays. Why?

Spinrad: There are only four things I see you can write about: sex, love, power and transcendence, that's it. Everything is a variance of a combination or interaction of these things. Also money...

Thrust: But money and power are really the same, they're negotiable.

Spinrad: Maybe, but not always. It's easier to trade power for money. But in a way, I think 90% of science fiction deals with powerful charismatic characters. In The Men in the Jungle, which was Vietnam inspired, I had a character who functioned the same way as a hero in a conventional science fiction novel, except he was a shit. In The Iron Dream I did the same with Hitler.

Thrust: What possessed you to write a Nazi science fiction novel?

Spinrad: That's a question I've been asked alot; maybe I'll give a different answer this time. I've always been interested in Nazis. It's the essential mystery of the twentieth century. Hitler will be remembered long after any other figure of this time. The genesis of the book came out of a conversation with Michael Moorcock about sword and sorcery, and the relationship between the psychopathology of sword and sorcery and Nazism. If Hitler hadn't been Führer, he could have gone into that.

Thrust: Do you think sf has the potential to be bestseller material, or is the genre essentially limited in potential readership?

Spinrad: It depends on the book. Things are changing now. Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle have Vulcan's Hammer coming out and it's getting alot of push. There are probably three to five million people in this country who read some science fiction; sell a book to every one of them and you have a bestseller without touching any-

one else. How many people read? Fifty thousand in hardcover sales is a bestseller.

Thrust: How do you think Harlan and Silverbob and the other writers leaving the field will make out?

Spinrad: Silverbob is retiring, and I'm sure he'll make out fine. Harlan also has other sources of income, but if he writes a big book he'll do well. Barry Malzberg drives himself crazy; he writes too many books. Publishers won't take him seriously writing eleven books a year. But really only Kurt Vonnegut has broken out successfully.

Thrust: What are you doing now?

Spinrad: I'm writing a science fiction novel, The World Between, and it's turning out much longer than I thought. It's a sort of Jeffersonian, utopian, media, political novel, and it's the first novel wherein I've created a planet entirely. It's a planet that is the media capital of the galaxy. There is another constellation of planets that is sort of feminist fascist state.

Thrust: That doesn't sound like something of which Joanna Russ would approve.

Spinrad: I don't think any radical feminists would like this book. Joanna Russ, being fairly intelligent, and not as loony as some of the people who've turned up in fanzines lately, might not be too exercised about the book. It is an attempt, in regard to feminism, to talk about middle positions. Things that work, things that aren't bug-brained. When women's liberation becomes feminism, then a libertarian movement becomes just one more form of social fascism. It's the difference between the civil rights movement and the Black Power movement. Feminism pretends to be a pseudo-science, it pretends to be anthropology, which it isn't. It starts from an ideological position and then tries to prove it, it doesn't try to find out how things really work. And if they do find how things work and they don't like it, they try to talk their way around it. Besides, I don't trust anything that ends with "ism"---feminism, fascism, communism. In that sense, I suppose there are anti-feminist qualities to this book. But it is not a male chauvinist book by any stretch of the imagination. It's not a female chauvinist book either.

Thrust: Was it for this book that you did research on space colonies before writing the article in ANALOG?

Spinrad: No, that was earlier. That was Ben Bova's idea to do that article. He wanted a balanced view, since essentially all of the previous stuff had been publicity hand-outs by the L-5 Society.

Thrust: What was the response of the L-5 Society to the article?

Spinrad: One guy named Evan Arnold was very incensed; he was trying to sell an article to Ben on the same thing. I did a television show with them, and most of them seemed to understand that it wasn't negative, it was a critique, but some had seen nothing but their own press releases. With anyone questioning their specifics, they reacted in a very juvenile manner.

Thrust: Are you living off your writing?

Spinrad: Oh yea. I've been living off my writing since 1965.

Thrust: Your novels have been few and far between. Where does most of your money come from?

Spinrad: Damned if I know, to tell you the truth. I haven't published that many novels. 1966 was The Solarians, 1967 was Men in the Jungle and Agent of Chaos, 1969 was Bug Jack Barron, 1972 The Iron Dream, 1975 Passing Through the Flame, and that's about it. A couple of short story collections, two anthologies... well, obviously, I'm doing it! It takes me time to write, but each book means more to me personally. And

"I CAN REALLY SEE BOB DYLAN AS JACK BARRON."

at least with Bug Jack Barron I got paid accordingly, so I get more for each book. Also since Bug Jack Barron and The Iron Dream, everything is perpetually in print in Europe--everywhere but Germany. I get a lot of royalties for European sales, especially from France and England. I've done some television; I did two Star Treks, one of which got made. I did Land of the Lost. I did a script for Bug Jack Barron which has gone through innumerable options. It just went through its latest option and I get ten to fifteen thousand dollars an option. I've done magazine journalism and essays. I've had stories in PLAYBOY and OUI. From 1970 to 1973 I was writing a lot for the LA-Free Press as film critic and major columnist. I've written articles for ANALOG. For a period of two years I was writing an article a month for KNIGHT, which was later collected in a book called Fragments of America. Science fiction isn't my entire output; fiction isn't my entire output, nor is prose my entire output. I've done screenplays. I like it better that way. I don't want to have to grind out four or five science fiction novels a year just to stay even.

Thrust: Who owns the option on Bug Jack Barron?

Spinrad: Right now no one owns the option. I own the option, I own the script. I would like to produce it myself. I'd love to direct the damn thing.

Thrust: Do you have any tentative plans to get backing?

Spinrad: You're talking about going to someone and saying give me three million dollars. I don't have a track record as a feature film writer and certainly not as a director. It's very hard. Maybe if I had a bankable star lined up.

Thrust: I think Jack Nicholson might do well with the part.

Spinrad: Well, I think Nicholson was approached by some person at one time. Who I want is Bob Dylan.

Thrust: Can he act?

Spinrad: Who cares? No, for that part, if I directed it, I can really see Bob Dylan as Jack Barron. He doesn't have to act, it's psychodrama. I could direct Bob Dylan in that part. It's not a question of acting. Most Hollywood movies don't have any actors in them anyway. The stars don't have any range. You want a John Wayne character, you cast John Wayne. Hollywood films are caste by getting someone whose image matches the overtones and feelings you want for that character. Jack Barron has some psychic connection with what happened to Bob Dylan. I think if I ever got to do this, by the end of the film Dylan would hate my fucking guts, but I would have it on film.

Thrust: I'm not sure it would work.

Spinrad: The only other way to do it would be to get a really fine actor, with the range needed to play the part. But send a copy of this interview to Bob Dylan and I'll send him a copy of the script...

Thrust: I noticed that Passing Through the Flame had a lot of the elements and feel of science fiction, especially in the party sequence where the different rooms were portrayed almost as alternate realities, the grandiose power plays, and the character Star, who clearly was both telepathic and empathic...

Spinrad: One of the reasons I write and read science fiction is that it seems to be the only kind of fiction that is really dealing with the totality of man in society. Most mainstream novels take a narrow view, they're psychological novels. They don't deal with the body politic or how the individual relates to his social context. Passing Through the Flame was an attempt

to portray a world in the way of a science fiction novel like The World Between, which I'm writing now, except that it has to do with what more or less exists. I say more or less because obviously there has never been a rock festival on the grandiose scale of the last sequence.

Thrust: Passing Through the Flame seems to paint a rather romanticised version of the sixties.

Spinrad: Well look at the Fonz, man, the big romantic image of the fifties. Back then, what was that, that was a rock, a hood. That was someone who everyone came down very hard on. In the fifties, that was considered something dangerous, something unsavory, and not at all something to put on the media. But in the sixties after what came down in the sixties, and I've been told this by publishers, producers and TV and studio executives, they want to bury the sixties and forget it.

Thrust: Still, Passing Through the Flame is a romanticised version of the sixties, if only in that the major characters smoke dope constantly without ever really getting stoned.

Spinrad: I don't think what happened in Jango Beck's rock festival is romanticised, it's about the death of the sixties more than anything else.

Thrust: Death can be romantic...

Spinrad: I haven't really written my book about the sixties yet, Passing Through the Flame isn't it. A lot of bad stuff went down in the sixties and a lot of what has happened in the seventies is a direct result. But the stuff around now about the fifties is an artificially created phenomena, created by people who want the true history of the sixties buried.

Thrust: I think in the eighties, the sixties may be treated the same way the fifties are now, once they are safely in the past. There could be comedy soap operas called "Days of Our Joins" with hippy humor on a par with The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers.

Spinrad: It depends on what happens in the seventies. As things stand now you can't do that in books, movies or television. If you raise a whole generation of people ignorant of that history, that's the game, a whole generation of people made to go back to the fifties. It's working. Look at the campuses. They're all worried about the jobs they'll get. There was a romanticised stoned out feeling in the sixties that things would keep changing and the future would be better. That feeling is not as prevalent now as it was. The eighties might turn out to be really post-industrial, a complete breakdown of technology. It just happened here in New York, all the lights went out and the jungle came out of the sewers. That itself could precipitate a nostalgia for the sixties, for the worst part, the real revolutionary stuff. That's what happened to the sixties. All the energy that was going into a number of things, the arts, people's lives, was pre-empted by left wing politicians into stupid bug-brained political action. The sixties ended in 1968 when Bobbie Kennedy and Martin Luther King were killed. But then everyone knew what would happen if Nixon ever got to be president. People said back then we were crazy. Hell, I even thought all the CIA paranoia was crazy, but it was all true.

Thrust: I mouthed all that stuff back then, and even I was surprised when it really was, and they uncovered it all and put it on the six o'clock news.

Spinrad: Yea! It turned out to be worse than anyone imagined, almost. That is what's being suppressed.

Thrust: Do you think the science fiction field is more open to discussion and portrayals of the sixties?

Spinrad: No. This relates to science fiction as well as the media. Look what was published during the period

1967 to 1969--Bug Jack Barron, Camp Concentration, Barefoot in the Head, the Joanna Russ novels, Stand on Zanzibar, the Silverberg stuff. There was a tremendous burst of broken taboos and creative talent. Look at the whole period of 1965 to 1970 and how many new writers came into the field--two or three dozen important writers--Le Guin to Delaney to Zelazny, Disch, Malzberg, myself, Joanna Russ. It was a golden age of science fiction. Look at the difference in editors. We had Ernsberger, a fine line at Avon, Terry Carr, and a lot of other really creative editors. Now the commercial mentality has returned with a bang. I'm not putting down Judy-Lynn del Rey or Lester, but I think you can see the difference between Ballantine now versus when Betty Ballantine was running it.

Thrust: Is any sort of new wave backlash involved in this?

Spinrad: What the new wave was was that there was an old wave, almost an ideology, parameters like the strong hero, the positive ending, belief in ideological positivism, the values of science and the notion that science fiction was basically selling to young men. The new wave was that people broke out of these boundaries in all different directions. Who's a better hard science fiction writer, Larry Niven or J.G. Ballard? Anyone who calls Micheal Moorcock a nihilist is crazy and doesn't know what he is talking about. Who are all these nihilist new wave writers? I'm not, Delaney isn't, Moorcock isn't. J.G. Ballard is a nihilist... But he's only one. A lot of the novels of the sixties couldn't have been written in the seventies. It's a different editorial climate. David Hartwell is a good editor though--he's editing two lines of books and a magazine.

Thrust: Was your story which was published in COSMOS written especially for Dave Hartwell?

Spinrad: No, that was just a story I did.

Thrust: What do you think about Lester del Rey reviewing for ANALOG with Ballantine issuing a del Rey line edited by Judy-Lynn del Rey?

Spinrad: I question whether Lester should be reviewing for ANALOG, although I have defended him to some people for that. But reviewing his own books, that's going too far. If he's going to stay reviewing, he should assign a guest reviewer for those books. I'm waiting for him to give a scathing review to a book he bought. Science fiction is such an incestuous field. The writers are editors are reviewers. If not Lester, then who? You have to find a reviewer who doesn't do anything else. And then people say who the hell is that and what does he know? It is one of the problems with the field, but it is also one of the strengths--the writers edit and the editors write. Lester did a strange review of Bug Jack Barron, by the way. The book was clearly on the other side of what he was favoring in science fiction, but he had a very hard time giving the book a bad review because he liked it. The basic thrust of the review was that it wasn't really science fiction, because if this is sf and he liked it, there's something wrong. Then he gave a smaller rave review to The Left Hand of Darkness. The new rave reviewers did the same thing to old wave writers. I was really upset in 1969 when Bug Jack Barron didn't win the Nebula; the Hugo I had less illusions about. Not only did Bug Jack Barron not win, but Slaughterhouse Five didn't win either. Is The Left Hand of Darkness really better than Slaughterhouse Five? What won the heblula the year Gravity's Rainbow was nominated? Who remembers? Who wants to? For me to think with what was going on at the time that Bug Jack Barron would get a Nebula or a Hugo was naive. Barry Malzberg--what does he expect? He's writing a strange sort of thing.

Thrust: What didn't you like about The Left Hand of Darkness?

Spinrad: I connect up with it, but there's one massive flaw. The core of the book was the hermaphroditic

"IF YOU'RE WRITING ABOUT SEX, YOU HAVE TO WRITE ABOUT SEX."

society and its sexuality. But it doesn't deal with it. It doesn't touch it. They aren't hermaphroditic personalities, they're really men, and Ursula tells you they can have babies. Jango Beck is more of a hermaphrodite than anyone in that book, in a funny kind of way.

Thrust: Then you think she should have developed and shown more of the culture of the society.

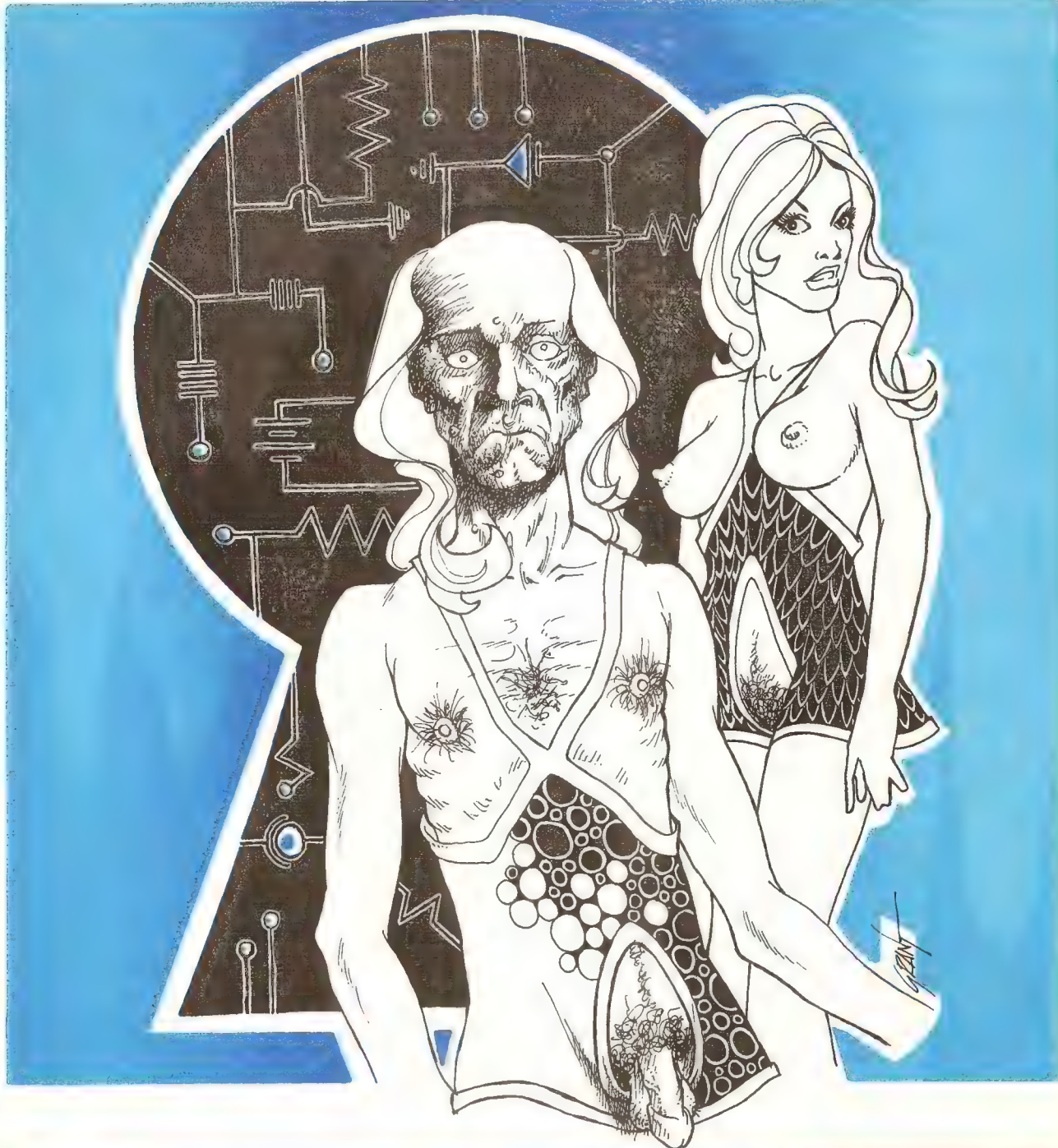
Spinrad: Well, if you're writing a book about a sexually deviant society, maybe this is just my purient interest, but god damn it, if you're writing about sex, you have to write about sex. What happened on the ice pack? Fade out, dot, dot, dot. That's the core of the book and it isn't there. The concepts were in the book, but the human reality of it wasn't demonstrated. What is it really like to be these people? What are these people's heads like? What do they do in bed? But it's a matter of taste, too. To illustrate, there's a review Ursula did of The Iron Dream, not very favorable. She was talking about deficiencies in my prose style. I can't remember her exact reference; it was some obscure short story of mine. The line was something like a line of dialog where the woman says something to the man and I say her voice rippled the inside of his thighs. She goes on that this is bad writing--rippled like what? Like a field of grain? Like a flag in the wind? To me, that kind of criticism is exactly what I find wrong in her writing. To me, that's wrong-headed. I was describing the visceral effect that line of dialog had on the guy's body, a sexual attraction. To qualify rippled with "like a field of grain in the wind" is focusing the attention of that where it doesn't belong. Away from words for ways of feeling. Ursula is known as a good prose stylist, and I suppose she is. But it's a writing style where the writer and the reader are seeing the novel as a pattern of words on paper. Nice sentences, nice harmonious ways of stringing out words. That is not what I'm into. What I try to do is have the reader experience the book as a series of images, feelings and visceral reactions. Getting you as far inside the characters' perceptions as possible, so that there is no author's stepping back and saying three months later he found himself here--it's all total character viewpoint. That's the kind of writing I do and like and that's what I found missing in The Left Hand of Darkness. Ideally, the reader should see what the character sees and feel what the character feels, whether he's nervous or sexually aroused, not see it from the outside. Otherwise it's just a television scenario.

Thrust: How did you handle this problem in the translation of the novel Bug Jack Barron into a screenplay?

Spinrad: I found I had to develop a cinematic language that was equivalent to the prose style of the book. It's a weird screenplay. You can give stream of consciousness images in movies. You can solarize scenes in the middle; the screenplay has five or six cuts in it, computer animation, split screen, quick cut images, and in one place kinestatics. There's a movie with the whole history of America done in sixty seconds with just many, many hundreds of still shots. The eye can accomodate numerous images per second. There are things I could do in the book I couldn't do in the screenplay, but there's also things that can be done on the screen which can't be done in a book.

Thrust: Then you are pleased with the screenplay?

Spinrad: Yea, I think it's pretty good. It was done in 1969, and I thought that's where films were going at the time.



MY COLUMN

TED WHITE

IN PASSING: I don't want to dwell on the unpleasantness which surrounded this Column's exit from its former residence — Andrew Porter's letter on the subject and my reply can be found elsewhere in this issue. However, it's been a source of irritation for me that until the publication here last issue of the Column in question entirely too many people seemed to regard it — sight unseen — as in some way defective or otherwise suspect. As the editor of AMAZING SF I've received several letters from readers who all but accused me of "playing fast and loose with the facts in that column that got you kicked out of Algol...." This opinion of the Column was Andrew Porter's, and he presented it to the world in last winter's Algol in a fashion which was apparently persuasive to some of his readers.

I trust that now that the Column in question is a matter of public record — available to one and all for examination in the last issue of this publication — Porter's slander against the column can be laid to rest. In SFR 22 Richard Geis notes, "The Ted White Column was about art directors in science fiction, and the problems inherent. Very good, full of inside information and examples. He does name a few names, but.... Well, I suppose Andy was uncomfortable with Ted in ALGOL and.... and now ALGOL is a nice, safe, inoffensive, bland 'Magazine About Science Fiction' for the relatively mass market that Andy is seeking." (Those "..." are Geis's, by the way, and don't represent any condensing on my part.)

I think Geis has put his finger on it. "Bland" is a word I hope will never be applied to this Column, and it was indeed with the purpose of passing on "inside information and examples" that I wrote those many Columns for ALGOL.

The question now facing me is this: is a column of "inside stuff" about the science fiction field appropriate to THRUST? Do THRUST'S readers want a direct continuation of My Column as it evolved in ALGOL — or would you rather something different? And if so, what? Your letters (care of THRUST) on this topic would be appreciated.

HEAVY METAL: Thus far six issues of HEAVY METAL have been published. HEAVY METAL is a comic book for grownups — more specifically for grownups who are into fantasy and sf. As such, it's probably the first. Although there are other comic publications in the same basic size (TIME-size), and price range (\$1.50), they are simply black & white versions of stock adolescent comics, most of them published by Warren (CREEPY, EERIE, VAMPIRELLA) or Marvel (versions of THOR and the HULK, &s with CONAN et al), Marvel's UNKNOWN SF condescendingly reinterpreted sf for the comic book audience, and failed to approach even the standards set down in the early fifties by EC — in either art or story.

All of these comics have in common the fact that they are limited by their publishers' and editors' conception of the audience being appealed to. And not one of those publishers or editors seriously considers going after an adult audience, despite a certain amount of lip service being paid to "modern sophistication" and "higher standards."

In France they take a very different attitude toward illustrated continuity — comics. Even those comics ostensibly created for children ("of all ages") like TIN TIN or ASTERIX have a cleverness of wit — and an amazingly sophisticated sense of draftsmanship — unknown in this country. It stands to reason that in France a decent comic book for adults might be conceived and properly executed. As it was with METAL HURLANT, a publication started a few years ago by a cooperative of French artists who wanted the outlet for their work.

On certain levels METAL HURLANT resembles the underground comics published here. Indeed, the two come together in HEAVY METAL, which is about 75% reprinted from METAL HURLANT and takes its direction and form from that magazine, for the remaining 25% of HEAVY METAL'S material comes from American "underground" artists (principally, thus far, Richard Corben and the late Vaughn Bode).

The principal difference between both METAL HURLANT and HEAVY METAL and the American undergrounds is the package. Although some undergrounds use interior color, most are black and white and the paper is usually newsprint. (ARCADE represents an attempt to escape the newsprint ghetto with a larger format and decent white offset stock, but this costs

a lot more, an important consideration in the publication of undergrounds.) HEAVY METAL is printed on slick coated stock and uses full color on about half its stories. The color separations are photographic, which allows the artists full rein with their use of color. In Corben's stories, for example, each panel is a lushly colored painting. Visually, most impressive.

The stories told in HEAVY METAL are often inscrutably surreal, but full of surprising depth. This is because they take as their starting points *adult* suppositions — sometimes cynical, always knowing. There is little or no melodrama; there is instead a feeling of understatement, of world-weariness transposed into other times and environments.

HEAVY METAL'S star contributor is the Frenchman who signs himself "Moebius." His style is at once distinctive and exemplary. He is an excellent illustrator, each of whose panels stands alone as good (indeed, often perfect) illustrations, but who crafts each facing pair of pages for balance and continuity and who understands pace and story development. His stories could easily be used as storyboards for animation: they reveal a sharp director's eye for movement and perspective. Moebius works in both black & white and color; his color work appears to be little different from the b&w work in terms of line and style, however. The color is in washes that delineate areas and subtle gradations without obscuring the basic black lines that describe his style.

Like the artist who does TIN TIN — Herge — Moebius can devote an entire page to a single scene; his alien city on p.25 of HEAVY METAL #6 is a delight both in terms of architectural draftsmanship and a purely sf sensibility. Detailed, evocative, realistic and yet stylized as all his work is stylized, it sums up much that is right with HEAVY METAL.

Richard Corben's "Den," which has been serialized in every issue, is nearly the equal of Moebius' work. Visually, it's excellent. Corben has refined his highly modeled style over the years until it approaches perfection. His use of color is at once personal and vivid. He too has a cinematic eye for perspective and movement; his page layouts are excellently paced. And HEAVY METAL'S printing and production lets him show off his work to its best advantage.

Where Corben falls down, I think, is with his story. Serialization probably doesn't help; the surreal perspectives of the story are lost in some installments. But too often "Den" is simply episodic, moving from adventure to adventure, from fight scene to fight scene, with little forward movement and little character development. I get the impression that "Den," with its story of a person incarnated in the naked hairless humanoid body of a giant in a violent fantasy world the person does not understand, is a wish-projection fantasy on its creator's part. I don't know whether this is in fact the case, but that's the impression that comes across to me.

I mentioned Vaughn Bode as the other American artist represented thus far in HEAVY METAL. The first four issues serialized his "Sunpot," most of which first appeared in GALAXY. And therein lies a story.

In 1969, soon after I had become editor of AMAZING, Vaughn Bode approached me about doing a special feature for that magazine. What he had in mind, he said, was four pages an issue of a serialized Bode comic strip. I liked the idea, but wondered if I, new to the magazine, could sell it to the publisher. Vaughn wanted a good money deal, and when I figured it out I realized that what he was asking per page was more than we'd pay for either a page of story or a page of art — more than twice as much, in fact. But I didn't begrudge him that. I liked the idea of making both AMAZING and FANTASTIC more multi-media; I liked the idea of "graphic art" in them. (Mike Hinge had a twenty-page item called "Robocop" which I was also excited about; I wanted to make it the lead story in an AMAZING.)

Alas, several factors did the basic idea in; the publisher was unhappy about the idea of "doing comics" and by an unfortunate coincidence he had been with Avon when that publisher tried binding a comic (a full issue minus covers) into OUT OF THIS WORLD ADVENTURES, a (very) short lived sf pulp circa 1950, and he had that as a bad example to point

to. We ran one four-page story by Jay Kinney in FANTASTIC under the heading of "Fantastic Illustrated" and that was that. No more.

But that's not why "Sunpot" didn't appear in AMAZING. Vaughn told me that he'd mentioned it to then-editor of GALAXY Ejler Jakobsson, and Jakobsson was interested in it. In fact, he was sufficiently interested in "Sunpot" to offer Vaughn four times the price Vaughn had asked of us. Under the circumstances, I told Vaughn, the best thing to do was to take up the offer from GALAXY. "I can't match their offer," I told him. Knowing the past history of disputes between Bode and GALAXY, I didn't expect the association to last long. "Take their money while you can," was my advice.

I was right. Only a few months later Vaughn was in my living room showing me the originals of "Sunpot" for comparison with the printed versions. Despite promises to the contrary, the editors at GALAXY had changed some of the captions and dialogue, and for one installment they reversed the order of two pages (I believe the third and fourth, but I'm going on memory here....). Worst of all, they totally rejected the concluding installment, cutting the series short with its penultimate chapter.

What did I get out of all that? Four lovely covers (all rejected in the proposal stage in 1969 by GALAXY/IF) by Vaughn Bode & Larry Todd, and the realization that I wasn't going to be able to use any "graphic art" (comic) work in my magazines after all. (Artists lined up for "Fantastic Illustrated" had included Jeff Jones, Mike Kaluta and Art Spiegelman; I'd hoped to get underground Big Names like Crumb and Shelton eventually...*sigh*....)

The version of "Sunpot" which appeared in HEAVY METAL was, I think (without direct comparisons) the original Bode version, and includes the never-published-in-GALAXY conclusion. Since Bode did "Sunpot" in black & white, it has been colored after the fact in the style Bode himself used in his color work.

However, when all is said and done, "Sunpot" is not Bode at his best. I don't know if it would have developed as it did had he done it for AMAZING; with GALAXY Vaughn knew he was dealing with The Enemy and it must have colored his work. "Sunpot" is as cynical as Bode ever got, but less inspired (on that level or any other) than his more enduring work. Artistically it remains pure Bode, however; full of delight with line and shape; voluptuous and battle-scarred.

Thus far I've remarked only upon the best in HEAVY METAL.

In general I feel that about one-third to one half of any given issue (thus far) of the magazine has been first-rate. That leaves another two-thirds to one-half.

A few pages each issue are taken up with text pieces; the average is four pages of set type and another page of illustration. These have included pieces by Lupoff and Zelazny; one gets the impression that these stories serve the same function that the two-page text-stories used to serve in the 10¢ comics of twenty (and more) years ago. I imagine most readers thumb right on past them.

Another serialized feature was "Age of Ages," subtitled "A gothic science-fiction trip to the apocalypse" by Akbar del Piombo and Norman Rubington. This is a collection of collages assembled out of old engravings, not unlike those animated by Terry Gilliam on the Monty Python tv show, but showing less humor and more surreality. I am certain that I encountered either this identical piece or one closely related to it in the early sixties in booklet form and published by Tulli Kupferberg and his Birth Press; as I recall it too was credited to Piombo, a pseudonym used by an author of Olympia Press novels in the fifties. (Possibly I saw the piece in EVERGREEN REVIEW; the more I contemplate my memory the less certain I am; it was in any case very much like the version published in HEAVY METAL.)

I confess that I never liked these collages, and I like them even less in the pages of HEAVY METAL. They are stiff, heavy, and static and the very antithesis of the suppleness of the art which is to be found on surrounding pages. I'm grateful that the series was abruptly terminated.

The worst of the drawn stories come too close to the self-indulgences of some underground comics; that is to say that the drawing is amateur in execution and the stories lack point or purpose. Some are experiments in surrealism

which simply cross the line into involution. Others have strong storylines and weak art.

Yet I don't begrudge this material. It indicates a willingness on the part of HEAVY METAL'S editors to allow experimentation and freedom of approach and attack. Yet I'm concerned about the fact that this material is all reprinted from METAL HURLANT; it seems to me that HEAVY METAL might be better devoted to the best from METAL HURLANT rather than the best and the worst mixed together. Still, the very fact that everything is not highly polished says something in HEAVY METAL'S favor — and it leaves room for growth and development in issues to come. I'd like to hope that in those issues more of the better American artists will be given the opportunity to do original work for the magazine now that the French example has been set. The combination of both French and American artists can be and should be a goad to superior work from all concerned.

STAR WARS ADDENDUM: Elsewhere in this issue you'll find a reprint of an article I wrote for THE UNICORN TIMES in which I reviewed Star Wars. Since I wrote that piece (May) I've written an editorial on the subject (for the December, 1977 FANTASTIC) and I'm about written out on the whole topic.

However, I did want to say a couple of things about the piece republished here. First, it was written for a non-af oriented audience. For that reason I was required to acquaint my readers with certain basics which most of you will take for granted. Second, it was written for specific space limitations (which I overshot by a few hundred words anyway); I rewrote it once in an effort to trim it down to size. For that reason it is in places somewhat compressed; I don't go into nearly the critical detail (much less the background justifications) which I might have, had I had unlimited space. Had I the space to outline the plot, for example, I'd have spent a lot more time on its shortcomings.

The publication of the review in the June issue of UNICORN TIMES (D.C.'s monthly entertainment paper) sparked a great deal of controversy. Editor Richard Harrington tells me that ours was the first negative review to be published (beating out the VILLAGE VOICE); it drew a lot of angry phone calls ("Who does that guy think he is?") and letters.

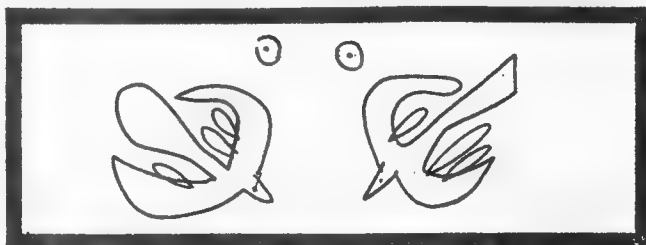
One typical response was that I just didn't seem to enjoy having "fun" any more; a more intelligent response was that I was saying that Star Wars wasn't good science fiction, but that didn't mean that it wasn't good "on its own terms," whatever those may be.

My position is that Star Wars is fundamentally dishonest. It sets up a Good vs. Evil situation, which demands that its characters represent attitudes rather than believable people. Nothing grows organically out of first premises; everything — situations, technologies, behavior — exists solely because of the "author's" manipulations. Star Wars is successful because most people don't care about this. Locked into a visually-stimulated "now," the audiences hardly care whether the connections between one scene and the next make any sense. Star Wars is a movie for people who don't want to think, but only to experience. And I'm left wondering if there is any reason why both appetites couldn't have been satisfied instead of only one.

I don't regret the review, nor have I had second thoughts about my position on the movie. With that said, I will drop the subject.

OUTRO: Let me remind you that I do want to hear from you about the nature and topics of future columns. Questions, subjects you'd like to see me deal with, whatever. Send those cards and letters in, folks.

--Ted White



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EDITORIAL

DOUG FRATZ

A few words on the Andy Porter versus THRUST situation:

In LOCUS #201, I ran the following classified advertisement:

WHY DID ANDY PORTER throw Ted White out of *Algol*? To find out, read *Thrust* - SF in Review #8, \$1.25, Thrust Publications, 2008 Erie St. #2, Adelphi, MD 10783. Special Ted White issue.

Soon afterwards, I received a short letter from Andy Porter as follows:

Dear Doug:

I must say I was unhappy when I read your classified ad in LOCUS. Accordingly, I've decided not to accept your classified ad for the upcoming issue of *ALGOL*. A refund check for \$3.30 is enclosed.

Maybe your next ad for LOCUS can start off, "Why did Andy Porter Throw Thrust's Ad out of *ALGOL*?"

Sincerely,
Andrew Porter

I wrote the following letter back to Andy and I think it states my position very clearly:

Dear Andy,

Andy, I think you're greatly overreacting to all of this.

You made a decision to drop Ted White's column from *ALGOL*, and I think you should be willing to at least stand behind that decision now with some dignity. A magazine as prominent in the field as *ALGOL* is cannot drop a major columnist without drawing some comments. Do you really think that the fannish rumor mill would be kinder to you than an open discussion in *THRUST*?

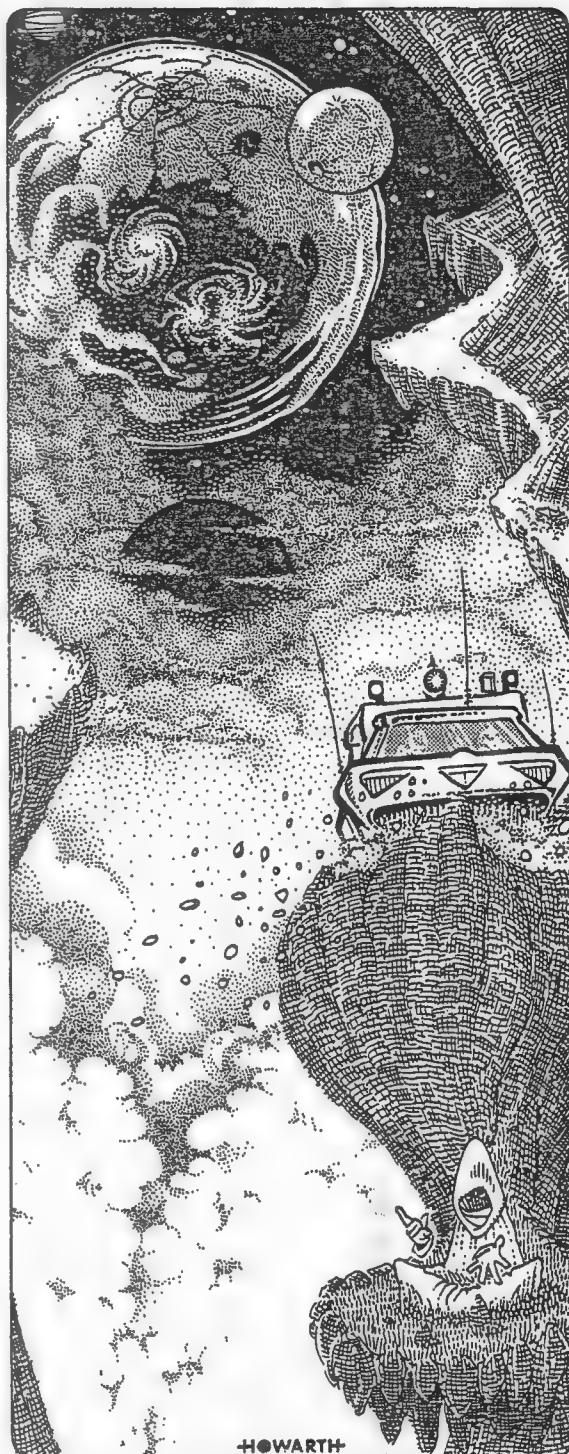
We at *THRUST* are not hounding you in any way. All that has appeared so far is one question in an interview and an ad mentioning it, and all that will appear in the future are your answer to Ted and his answer back. A straight forward answering of questions which would have been asked, if not in print, then via the rumor mill.

The ad in LOCUS which made you unhappy was, in my opinion, rather innocuous. Perhaps it should have read, "Why does Ted White think that Andy Porter will no longer run MY COLUMN in *ALGOL*?" But isn't that really the same thing with a higher word count? I certainly feel I have the right to advertise anything I print in *THRUST*.

Andy, you're acting like you have something to hide, and it doesn't fit the editor and publisher of the sf field's foremost non-fiction magazine. I plan to stand behind any decisions I make at *THRUST* quite candidly and openly, and I think you owe it to yourself to do the same.

Yours truly,
Doug Fratz

I must say that I am also rather disappointed with



HOWARTH

Andy's refusal to accept advertising for THRUST in ALGOL. The classified ad I had sent him earlier stated simply that THRUST now contained Ted White's MY COLUMN. formerly in ALGOL. Judging from his past reader surveys, I'm sure that ALGOL has many readers who would be interested in knowing that Ted White's column is still seeing print elsewhere. Andy is doing his readers a disservice by hiding this fact from them.

* * *

I'm very pleased with this issue, but there's a lo. missing.

When it came time to lay out this issue, we came up against what will become a continuing problem for awhile-- I found I had 2% more material than I could publish, all of which I really wanted to publish this issue.

So I had to start cutting.

The first thing to go was my column this issue, "The Alienated Critic," in which I was going to review the newest additions to the sf magazine field, ASIMOV'S, COSMOS, GALILEO and UNEARTH. That column will be run next issue. I almost had to cut the piece by Charles Sheffield, but was able to fit it in at the last minute. (In case you don't recognize the name, Charles Sheffield is, in my opinion, along with John Varley, one of the Writers To Watch Out For in the sf field in the next few years.) I had to cut well over twenty book reviews, a dozen of them my own. And to add insult to injury, Dan and I had to leave literal piles of artwork molding in the files...

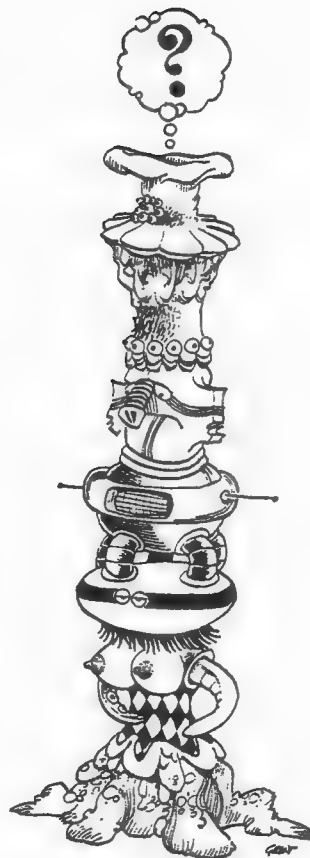
C'est la publishing.

But I, as editor, probably won't have this many problems when I, as publisher, start breaking even--which should be any year now. If I'm not losing on THRUST, I can afford to reach the final maturation in schedule and format we hope to attain--a 64 page quarterly magazine with interior color and lots of other flashy, but personable, special effects.

As for now, we're stuck with 48 pages every six months.

And I think I'll let those 48 pages this issue speak for themselves.

-Doug Fratz



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the ECLECTIC COMPANY

chris lampton

(Last issue I began in this column a discussion of science fiction writers who have broken through the barriers of the so-called sf "ghetto" and published work in other fields. That discussion continues here.)

I have a great deal of respect for what Dean Koontz has done.

In a purely artistic sense, his mainstream output — which already represents a considerable body of work — hardly bids fair for literary immortality. But Koontz in the last four years has shown strengths as both storyteller and stylist that simply weren't present in his science fictional work of the late sixties and early seventies. Furthermore Koontz seems to be writing what he enjoys writing, what he genuinely wants to write, an achievement of no small value. It seems almost incidental that he is, by his own admission, making a great deal of money in the process.

(Ah, Mammon! We true artists are of course not tempted by such crass considerations. Starvation is good for the soul, it says so right here.)

Consider the books themselves. In a period of four years (five, if you count one book published in 1972) Koontz has published eleven novels, which — despite occasional speculative content — are clearly outside of our field. (Koontz, it might be mentioned, claims to be done with this field for good. Nightmare Journey, published in 1975, is an aberration, actually written and sold some years earlier.) Only three of these novels have appeared under Koontz' name; the others were written under three pseudonyms: K.R. Dwyer, David Axton and Brian Coffey.

The Coffey novels, with one exception, are unquestionably Koontz' barrel scrapings. The first three — Blood Risk, Surrounded, and The Wall of Masks — recount the exploits of a professional thief named Mike Tucker; taken together, they have all the impact of a bad television crime series. The writing is hurried and pulp-magazine mechanical, the plots staggeringly unimaginative. Tucker, the rebellious rich kid who pursues an underworld career rather than enter his father's business, becomes insufferable after perhaps four chapters. The first two books are almost grimly humorless; the third, in a misguided attempt to remedy this omission, degenerates into giddy self-parody.

The fourth Coffey book, The Face of Fear, is a surprise. The plot, while sometimes heavy-handed and burdened with unnecessary complexities, features a lengthy sequence that borders on tour de force: a former mountain climber and his girlfriend are trapped in a New York skyscraper by a psycho-

tic killer, with no way out except down the sheer face of the building. But the mountain climber still bears the psychological scars of a terrifying climbing accident and can't bring himself to make the descent....

A grand piece of suspense writing, more than worth the price of admission.

Koontz has produced only one novel, Prison of Ice, under the David Axton name. What to say about it? It's an effective if unexceptional pulp adventure, somewhat juvenile in tone, stripped down in plot. The characterization is perfunctory, the climax predictable. The plot concerns a team of engineers attempting to transport an iceberg from the arctic into southern waters; the iceberg breaks up, leaving everyone stranded; a Russian submarine (shades of Marooned) performs the rescue. The plot structure is conventional for this sort of thing. Despite (or perhaps because of) some sex scenes, the appeal is mostly on an adolescent level. It reads quickly, at least.

And then there is Dwyer. Chase, the first published of Koontz' non-sf work, would seem to be the watershed novel of his career. It is in some ways crude, but its nearly compulsive readability can hardly be denied. The plot foreshadows several of Koontz' continuing interests: the psychotic killer, the protagonist still brittle from past torments. Some of the plot trappings are less than effective: the hero's inability to convince the authorities that someone is trying to kill him never becomes believable, the romantic subplot is laid on with too heavy a hand. But, despite everything, the plot *moves*.

Shattered may be an attempt to rework Chase without the flaws. If so, it almost succeeds. But once again Koontz falls victim to the same trap: his character's inability to convince the authorities of his peril, while essential to the extended suspense of the plot, is never totally convincing. Koontz asks the reader to believe that no one — *no one* — in the entire Southwestern U.S. will cooperate with a young man who believes that his life is in danger, *simply because the young man has long hair*. Paranoia may be the lot of Koontz' (and my) generation, but his perceptions seem to have been warped by some bitter experience of his own. I can't buy it.

Despite that, Shattered is almost a model of suspenseful construction. The plot is elegantly unfolded, the action sequences neatly balanced by passages of psychological introspection, the prose almost uncannily well-suited to the subject. Highly recommended.

I've read only the first few chapters of *Dragonfly*, the third and most recent novel to appear under the Dwyer name. It opens with a strong, highly encapsulated suspense sequence, followed by some talky, rather uninspired exposition. While the first two Dwyer novels were small, rather jewel-like exercises in personal conflict, this — like the novels written under Koontz' own name — is an obvious attempt at Blockbuster Bestseller material. It looks like a worthwhile read, though I'm hardly in a position to comment.

Neither have I read *Hanging On*, Koontz' first non-pseudonymous mainstream work. The jacket copy compares it to *M*A*S*H* and *Catch-22*, probably because of its farcical (but, I presume, ultimately serious) outlook on war. Koontz claims that it derives more from the work of Robert Klane (*The Horse is Dead*, *Fire Sale*, *Where's Poppa?*) than from Heller and Hooker; having read neither Klane nor *Hanging On*, I needs must take him at his word. The writing, I might add, looks from a brief perusal to be the best that Koontz has done. The style is rich and comic, surprisingly complex.

If the Bestseller is a genre, its most rigorously defined sub-genre is the Arthur Hailey novel: huge cast of characters, inside dope on one of the more exotic American industries, glamorous settings, legal and semi-legal behind-the-scenes machinations. Hailey, who popularized if not perfected the form, turns such books out like frozen soufflés: *Airport*, *Wheels*, *The Moneychangers*.

Koontz' *After the Last Race* fits neatly into the mold, but like Scottia and Robinson (see last issue's column) Koontz does it vastly better than Hailey himself. *Last Race* is pure soap opera, but it is brisk, fun, intelligent soap opera. While Hailey's novels read like the unedited maunderings of a graduate research assistant, Koontz wisely subordinates his (obviously exhaustive) background knowledge — concerning the operation of a large race track — to the characters and plot. And the heist that provides the focus of the story generates a great deal of fun.

Night Chills may be Koontz' most ambitious suspense novel to date. Given the subject matter (mad scientist on a quasi-John Norman S/M trip) it could easily have been offensive — I suspect that some readers will find it so anyway — but Koontz has constructed his plot so ingeniously that the book's oddly perverted appeals only add to the effectiveness of the storytelling. Much of it seems silly in retrospect; the characters are mere instruments of auctorial necessity (though given the books thematic content this may not be accidental); but Koontz suspends disbelief with a deft hand.

In sum Koontz' strengths, whatever his weaknesses (and he does have weaknesses), are those of the storyteller, the talespinner. At their best his books are compulsively readable; strange, given the mediocrity of his previous sf output. He seems to be in control of his style now, aware of the delicate interrelationship of plot and tone, story and voice. His gifts, I think, make his faults seem insignificant.

The less said about *The Multiple Man* by Ben Bova, the better. In the strictest sense it is science fiction, but the packaging — and the author's approach to the story — indicate that it was aimed at the larger audience. On the basis of the present evidence, Bova's attitude toward that audience would seem to be one of contempt: the plot is not just bad, it is asinine (the President of the United States turns out to be — aw, hell; I can't bring myself to type the words); the characters make cardboard look dynamic, the prose clomps along like wet galoshes. Bova, a man of varied and often impressive talents, has produced better; I doubt that he's capable of worse.

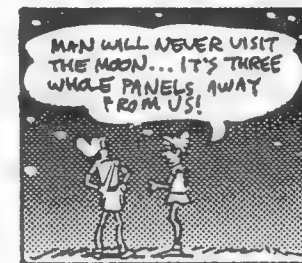
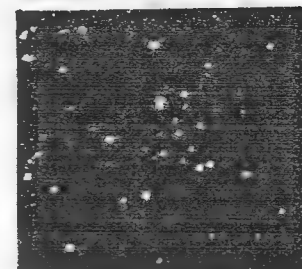
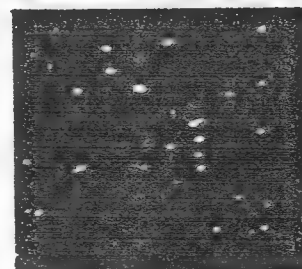
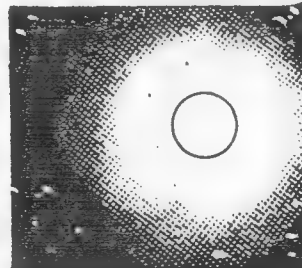
Felicia by George Alec Effinger would benefit from either less of Effinger's skill as a satirist or less of his sense of story values. What could have been a rousing if mindless entertainment like *The Glass Inferno* — or a freewheeling piece of backwoods buffoonery with overtones of *Fernwood 2 Night* — ultimately falls between tables and becomes neither. Effinger continually undercuts his own narrative with sly satiric jabs, then pulls back from the brink of farce with large dolllops of straight-faced storytelling. The result is

too funny to be an effective suspense novel, but too earnest to produce more than a disappointed smile.

For a field perennially thought to be a ghetto, beyond which writers proceeded at their own risk, at threat of great personal peril, science fiction seems to be giving up her favored sons at an alarming rate. The ghetto gate, if not open, at least appears to be unlocked.

Are there conclusions to be drawn from the above? I think so, though what they are and how they could be best expressed I'm still not sure. In the next few months I plan to read still more non-sf work by authors identified with the field — Gene Wolfe's *Peace*, Phil Dick's *Confessions of a Crap Artist*, Malzberg and Pronzini's *The Running of the Beasts*, Niven and Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* — and to report on them in these pages.

-Chris Lampton



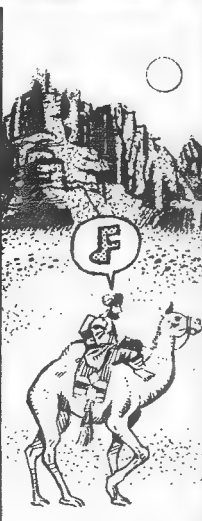
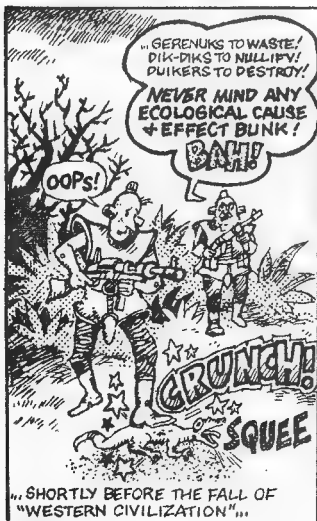
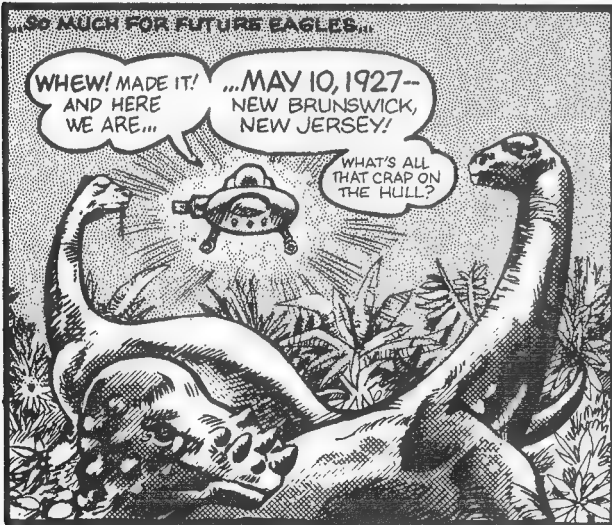
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CRETACEOUS!

WHENEVER THE "WHEEL" OF THE PAST IS "TURNED," SOMEONE MAY GET THE **WRONG** NUMBER...

"LARS" HAMPTON & HIS FAITHFUL COMPANION BUNKY ARE **TEMPORAL HUNTERS** FROM 3151 A.D.! JETTING THRU THE VOID, THEIR CRAFT IS **SUDDENLY** SEIZED BY A **TIME STORM** AND IS HURLED HELPLESSLY ABOUT, LIKE A BUCKET FULL OF **EELS**, TWELVE **TIME MILES** PAST **BABYLON!**

ELSEWHEN: CONSIDER THE MAJESTIC MASTADON! FEATHERLESS, YET FRIEND TO THE AIR, OLD COMRADE TO **FUTURE EAGLES...**



IT WAS IN THE SCHEME OF NATURE,
AND IT WAS HUNGRY! IT LURCHED
FORWARD ON STEAMING GREAT FEET,
HISSING LIKE A VERY LARGE ANIMATED
BOILER! IT WAS VICIOUS IN A FLASH
WITH TEETH LIKE A PICKET FENCE
OR JACK-HAMMERS! SIZE CAN
BE THRILLING, TOO!

**GRA-
HONK!**

**AWA!
CROCODILE!**

**THEN WE ARE
IN NEW JERSEY!**

**BLAZING
COMETS!**

CLICK!

PHUT!

ELECT!

**THUD
THUD**

THUD

**BUNKY, DO US ALL
A FAVOR AND
OPEN FIRE!**

AAARRRRR

**BLAM BLAM
POW BAM
POW BAM
POW**

**BAM BAM
BAM BAM
POW POW
KRAK TAT
TAT POW**

KLAK KLAK

ULP!

**HHHURR-
RACCH!**

**HUR-RA-
P!**

**"NO!"
"I..I.."**

**"...MOST
UNUSUAL..."**

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Steve Ditko

END

HARLAN, COME HOME!

an open letter to Harlan Ellison

by Charles Sheffield

I just read your article in Fantasy and Science Fiction. ("You Don't Know Me, I Don't Know You"; July 1977). You are right, it's a crying shame that science fiction appears so low on the totem pole of Publisher's Weekly. That means no prestige for science fiction writers -- and less money, too. The publishers' attitude is worse than bad, it's disgraceful, and it would be nice if the world were different. On that point, as on most things in your article, I agree with you completely.

We agree on the problem; we disagree on the solution. Your approach is to make sure that your works are not tainted with the label of science fiction, anywhere, on the books or in the advertising. Silverberg and Malzberg are following the same line -- which seemed to work well for Vonnegut. Fine. But do you really believe that you are no longer writing science fiction? If you say yes, I'll be suspicious. You started too young, and it's too deep in your system to be banished so easily. You can call it something else -- mainstream? -- but I'll bet it reads like sf.

If you find that premise even halfway plausible, follow me in a logical exercise. If the best writers in a field say they have left it, that field will be measured by the output of those who remain. Logic demands that those who remain are not the best writers. The literary merit of the average product, measured by any yardstick you care to choose, has to go down. Keep this up for a few years, and lo and behold, Publishers Weekly won't have much regard to the standards of writing. Rates will be minimal, and publicity poor to non-existent. If you believe that you are one of the better writers of science fiction, you also have to believe that your departure will weaken sf. Only if you think you are a worse-than-average writer of sf can you argue that your absence will help the rest of us.

This wouldn't be relevant if sf writers were like reptiles, laying their eggs and wandering away -- to hell with the next generation, let them raise themselves and fight their own battles. It isn't that way. The field is tight-knit, and most writers care about and encourage the up-and-comers. They do it, even though the youngsters are new competition for a limited market. Somewhere in New York City there is a teenage fan and would-be sf writer. He is your spiritual heir. Right now he is producing the most awful

garbage you can imagine (remember?) but one day he will be producing works of high quality, works that say something new. When that glorious day arrives, he will find that he can't get accepted for what he is -- a good writer. It's 1988, but he is tagged as an "sf writer", and that label is still a derogatory one. Why? Because you, and others like you who could label all their works Science Fiction, and continue to educate publishers as to the quality of writing in the field, have instead elected to deny your birthright; for dollars, and for a little respect from publishers who don't know or understand what sf is all about, and who couldn't write it themselves if they tried for a hundred years.

You, Silverberg and Malzberg should be leading the battle for science fiction -- not in full retreat from the front.

If you don't fight, who will fight? The newcomers, with no weapons? Science fiction needs leaders -- and, a few rude and stupid fans notwithstanding, you'll get more esteem and affection as a leader of sf-writing (your first home) than you will ever receive as a swimmer in the cold and impersonal Mainstream. Did you read Nabokov's obituaries? They were dry, analytical essays, with no drop of sorrow or personal grief.

What I'm saying here isn't so new. Take a look at Browning's poem, "The Lost Leader". See how he felt when Wordsworth "sold out" and accepted the position of Poet Laureate. "Just for a handful of silver he left us....we that had loved him so, followed him, honored him, lived in his mild and magnificent eye..."--I'm a little doubtful about the 'mild' bit, but most of it applies.

As you said, you don't know me and I don't know you. I don't know if you make a good living from your writing, or if you are really struggling to make ends meet (though I must say, I have my suspicions). That being the case, there is one way you can silence me absolutely. We all have to eat. Tell me that you can't make a living when you publish with an sf label, that you can only get by if you call your work by another name. Then I can't argue further. I have to say do your thing, and go in peace. But if you can't look me in the eye and tell me that, I say, "Come home, Harlan Ellison; all is forgiven."

-Charles Sheffield

THE LOST LEADER

Just for a handful of silver he left us,

Just for a riband to stick in his coat --

Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,

Lost all the others she lets us devote;

They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,

so much was theirs who so little allowed:

How all our copper had gone for his service!

Rags -- were they purple, his heart had been proud!

We that had loved him so, followed him, honored him,

Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,

Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,

Made him our pattern to live and to die.

Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,

Burns, Shelley were with us -- they watch from their graves.

He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,

He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves.

We shall march prospering -- not through his presence;

Songs may inspirit us -- not from his lyre;

Deeds will be done -- while he boasts his quiescence,

Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:

Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,

One task more declined, one more footpath untrod,

One more devil's triumph and sorrow for angels,

One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!

Life's night begins: let him never come back to us.

There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,

Forced praise on our part -- the glimmer of twilight,

Never glad confident morning again.

Best fight on well, for we taught him -- strike gallantly,

Menace our heart ere we master his own;

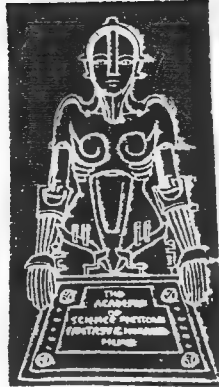
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,

Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne.

-Robert Browning

The Academy of Science Fiction Fantasy and Horror Films

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DR. DONALD A. REED
President

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THE GREAT STAR WARS DEBATE



DARRELL SCHWEITZER ■ TED WHITE ■ DOUG FRATZ

STAR WARS, a film by George Lucas (20th Century Fox, 1977, starring Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, and Alec Guinness)



First I'd like to get the actual content of this movie out of the way before discussing what Star Wars means to the science fiction field as an event.

In brief, the story is avowedly juvenile (so Lucas avows in the current STARLOG), an outer-space daydream for 14-year olds, but even as a juvenile it's remarkably simplistic, certainly not up to the level of Heinlein or even the best of PLANET STORIES. Call it the average PLANET STORIES.

Luke Skywalker (Hamill) loses his aunt and uncle to the depredations of the Imperial Space Marines, whereupon he finds himself on a quest across the galaxy to save the beautiful Princess Leia Organa (Fisher) from the clutches of the evil Galactic Empire (mostly Peter Cushing, plus a guy in a sinister mask and lots of extras) and remove the threat of tyranny from all worlds. This he does in short order, with the help of Ben Kenobi (Guinness), a former Jedi Knight and all around good guy, who is noble, wise, self-sacrificing, and supernaturally powerful. (Directly in touch with The Force.) Parallels to The Lord of the Rings are so obvious that when Kenobi allows himself to be zapped (no corpse, only empty clothing) one expects him to come back, just like Gandalf after his tussle with the Balrog. And sure enough, he does, if only as a voice-over, to help Luke in the most critical part of the climactic battle. The villain in the mask, Darth Vader, a former student of Kenobi's gone wrong, is Sauron, or maybe Sauruman.

You'll also notice similarities to The Wizard of Oz (intentional, I'm sure, since this is the kind of appeal Lucas seems to want). Luke could easily be Dorothy after some corrective surgery. There's a comic relief robot who is at least third cousin to the Tin Woodsman, and his companion, a cutesie thing which speaks only in blips, is a mechanical Toto. Among the fellowship of heroes is an animate carpet (so called once by the princess) called a Wookie, alias the Cowardly Lion. In this paradigm, Kenobi is one of the Good Witches in drag.

All right, what is this movie trying to do, and how well does it succeed? It is supposed to be juvenile escapism, full of goshwow wonders for young fans with wide eyes who've left their minds at home. Sheer fun, without a trace of intellectual challenge. Even as such, I think the script leaves a great deal to be desired. Kids especially, I suspect, like their action-adventure gripping and realistic, and Luke Skywalker's triumph comes much too easily. Serious lapses in logic abound, all on the side of the good guys, who consequently just can't seem to get into any danger. The Imperial Space Marines all carry blasters, but they miss

with a frequency unrivaled by the Germans on the old Combat TV series. They must all be terminal heroin junkies with the shakes, because they can't hit a thing, even a hero standing in an open corridor 20 feet away. They'd probably be more lethal throwing rocks. No one comes off with more than a scratch save for Kenobi, who sacrifices himself, and then he doesn't die, but is translated onto a higher plane and into the soundtrack.

If I'd been writing this, I think one of those stray energy bolts would have blown Luke Skywalker's arm off. This would come as a shock to those who like their daydreams completely antiseptic, but it certainly would have made the drama ten times more intense once it was made clear that the alleged threat of the Empire can reach out and touch, not just a minor character, *but the star!* Also it would enable the film to come to grips with adult reality, as any good juvenile should: the great feats would be achieved through effort and suffering, rather than for free. And, Luke would no doubt get a prosthetic arm, which would have all sorts of gadget possibilities, and this would only aid him at the end when he has to fly a fighter ship in the last desperate (but shockingly easy) attempt to destroy the Empire's enormous fortress ship, the Deathstar. (These fighters, by the way, dogfight like something out of The Dawn Patrol, and when they take off there's a guy with glowing batons, like on a carrier flight deck. Veterans of the battle of the Coral Sea will no doubt get a weird sense of *deja vu* from this.)

As is, I would rate the plot as a pretty tepid collection of space opera cliches, and the dialogue is frequently funny, not always, I suspect, where it was supposed to be. The acting is television show competent.

And yet this movie is a major science fiction event! The reason for this is that the special effects are like nothing ever done before. They're at least the match of 2001, and far more varied. There's a bar scene which is an absolute classic. It's the old PLANET sleazy dive, filled with bizarre creatures, but these creatures are the best nonhumans ever to appear on film. Lucas is parodying in this sequence, clearly. A bug-headed alien band plays swing music. The bar serves many races, but discriminates against robots. When a space pirate zaps an alien thug he slaps a coin on the counter and says, "Sorry about the mess." Also in the way of aliens we have meter high, hooded creatures with glowing eyes who dwell in a gigantic sand-crawling machine (from which they do an illegal business in kidnapped robots) and there are huge beasts of burden which are really made-up elephants, but you'll only recognize them because they're clearly alive and no other earthly creature is that big (except maybe a large rhino, which I doubt would cooperate). All this makes Star Trek look like a kindergarten masquerade. (George Scithers has pointed out that there's absolutely no purpose in making a Star Trek movie now. How could it be anything but a pale imitation of Star Wars?)

Even more spectacular are the planetscapes. Luke's home world has two suns, one red, one white, and the double sunset is awesome. The rebel base is on a habitable moon of a gas giant, and the huge red planet hanging over the jungle (from which protrude Aztec ruins, for some reason) is again overwhelming. There's a lovely effect as ships go into hyperspace, and the Empire's Deathstar, which at one point is mistaken for a small moon *looks that big*.

The importance of Star Wars lies not in what Lucas has done, but in what he has shown can be done. After this, I'm convinced just about any SF work can be adequately filmed, no matter how spectacular. The bar scene is right out of a Retief story, and if anybody ever wants to do the Foundation Trilogy, the Deathstar would be just right as Trantor. With techniques available to Lucas, someone could do Citizen of the Galaxy, Babel-17, The Stars My Destination — or any — thing. Alas, Lucas didn't even turn to Leigh Brackett's The Starmen or Llyrdis or Laumer & Brown's Earthblood, either of which would have been just the story he was after, only more intelligently executed. Maybe next time...and I'm sure there will be a next time, since Star Wars allegedly broke even on the third day of release.

See it for the astounding visuals and the marvelous incidental gimmicks (which the characters of course take for granted and don't explain), but ignore the silly plot and unconvincing situations.

—Darrell Schweitzer



I've been reading science fiction since 1947; I've been writing it since 1962. And I've seen most of the films which have been labelled "science fiction." I've yet to see one "science fiction" film which wasn't seriously flawed. And each time I see such a film, I ask myself, "Why?" Why, with all the time, all the money, all the dedicated effort which went into this movie, did they make such simple foolish mistakes? *Why?*"

I think the answer to this question lies in several areas. One such area is the way in which the modern movie is made — by committee, overseen by money men whose knowledge of movie-making has been traditionally limited to the profit-and-loss columns.

But another, far more serious problem has been that of translating what began as and still remains a *written* medium — words on the page — into a visual medium, into images on a screen.

Science fiction has many aspects which distinguish it from other forms of literature. One such aspect is the imagination it requires of its audience. Science fiction writers have asked their readers to imagine the nearly unimaginable — travel faster than light, the vastness of inter-





stellar space, and —equally important — the many aspects of *change* which are inevitable in future eras, change in the way things look, the way things work, and the way people act. And science fiction writers go for something called the *Sense of Wonder* — that feeling of awe which one feels when one glimpses something profoundly new and different beyond one's mundane reality. All of these things require an intelligent imagination on the part of the reader if he is to connect with the author's intentions. For this very reason science fiction has never been popular with the masses — and probably never can be.

However, much of the *hardware* of science fiction has caught the public imagination. For more than two generations now the gimmicks of science fiction have filtered out into the popular culture, usually devoid of any underlying substance. While once science fiction explored in many ingenious ways, for example, the inevitable paradoxes of time travel (the old favorite: if you went back in time and killed your grandfather, you would never have been born, and thus never able to go back in time, etc., which means that your grandfather would live and you'd be born and—), today in the comic books (and comic strips, like *Alley Oop*) time travel is treated as an elevator: "Hmmm, wonder what's happening today in 2023? Think I'll zoom up for a look!" Thus is a profound (and profoundly disturbing — what, after all, *is* time?) concept trivialized for mass acceptance.

In a similar fashion faster-than-light travel and most of the other gimmicks of science fiction have been transplanted, minus their science-fictional underpinnings, into the mass media. Thus *Star Trek*.

In science fiction one aspect of importance is the *organic reality* of what happens in a story. If the characters have space travel, their culture must have the *technology* for space travel, and consequently their society must have felt the *impact* of this technology and the consequences of space travel. (Our space technology, for example, has given

us modern sound processing tools, descendants of the technology developed to clean up television transmissions from other planets.)

Most science fiction in the movies makes use of the gimmicks, but ignores the underlying considerations involved in these gimmicks. *Star Wars* is no exception.

Thus far *Star Wars* has been the beneficiary of the biggest media hype since 2001. *TIME* magazine called it the year's best movie (with the year less than half over); *NEWSWEEK*'S raves were hardly less bombastic, and both the *WASHINGTON POST* and the *WASHINGTON STAR* loved it. The common denominator in all these reviews is the word "fun." The reviewers regard the movie as terrific fun, innocent and unjaded. One member of the audience at the advance screening I attended walked out afterward saying, "That's the best comic book I've ever seen." You can take that comment two ways — and it applies equally well both ways. Because this is the level on which *Star Wars* is fun: it restimulates the child in us. It is a tale of derring-do, unclouded by modern day notions of sex (the romance, such as it is, is very much like that in the old western serials), a story of Good vs. Evil, with vaguely mystical overtones. It partakes lightly of the quest aspects of Tolkien; there is even a two-dimensional copy of Gandalf.

It's a shame that a story this archetypal should have been done in such a stupid way.

Yes, stupid. What intelligence was applied to this film was applied only to the realization of the superficial. There is more thought involved in the special effects than was ever expended on what the special effects were supposed to mean. The story of *Star Wars* is monumentally stupid, relying upon coincidence and the stupidity of people who could never have attained the positions they hold, were they indeed that stupid.

The story, really an open-ended episode in a vaster story (and ready made for sequels already being geared up for

production), begins with the capture of Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher) by Lord Darth Vader (David Prowse). The Princess has stolen plans of the evil Empire's Death Star, a giant space station with the capability to destroy planets. As her spaceship is captured the Princess puts the plans in a small robot, R2-D2, and ships the robot with a companion robot, C3PO, out in a life capsule with instructions to deliver the plans to Obi Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness), who is the last of the Jedi Knights....

The robots are called "droids" rather than robots, in apparent derivation from "android." But androids are by definition artificially created living beings; the robots in the movie are machines explicitly stated to lack "life force."

In the first of many implausible coincidences, the life capsule lands the two robots on the nearest planet which just happens to be where Kenobi lives. In a series of coincidences too extraordinary for belief, the robots are delivered to Kenobi by Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), who just happens to be the son of Kenobi's old friend who was killed by Darth Vader. What follow are a series of cleverly juggled clichés straight out of the old Universal serials: Kenobi enlists the aid of a freebooter sapce captain and his ship and first mate. (Captain: Han Solo, played by Harrison Ford; first mate: Chewbacca, played by seven-foot-tall Peter Mayhew, built up to nearly eight feet.) Approaching the Death Star, Solo's ship is engaged in combat by Empire space-fighters. Quite unbelievably, Solo's armament is fired by hand, by a man in a chair-apparatus which swings up and down and around in an effort to track the fighters whizzing by. I doubt very much that at the velocities used in space this sort of arrangement would work at all -- however, it works in the movie.

This is because in fact these space battles -- especially the climactic one at the end of the film -- are not space battles at all. The amount of imagination, research and extrapolation needed for a genuine series of space battles (conducted over vast distances at high velocities, probably beyond the sight of the naked eye) was beyond George Lucas, who both wrote and directed the film and whose baby it is. Instead -- incredibly! -- he had a research team put together clips of World War 2 aerial dogfights, and based his space fights on these. Although those dogfights are *already* impossible with modern fighter planes (which fire missiles at each other from some distance), and would be totally beyond the realm of possibility in space (no air -- no way for a fighter to turn and bank) Lucas made them the basis of his battles in space. We have to ask *why*. The answer: it looks good. It looks good, that is, if you view it uncritically, if you never ask yourself *how* these fighters can maneuver so easily and abruptly in space, how their pilots could survive being mashed to quivering jelly by the sudden changes in course they execute. Against these absurdities the fact that the pilots use computerized targets to *hand-fire* their weapons is only a minor implausibility. (If their computers did the firing it would be much more accurate, thus shortening the battle scenes considerably.)

At one point one character tells another, "It took me only twelve parsecs to get here." A parsec is a measure of *distance* -- not time. It is as if he had said, "It took me only twelve miles to get here." Now "parsec" isn't all that esoteric a term; the fact that Lucas never bothered to check it out is a good indication of where his values are. In common with most other Hollywood directors of would-be science fiction movies, he is unconcerned with accuracy of detail or plausibility of action. As long as he can keep you watching his movie, he has accomplished all he wants or needs to do.

The "look" of the movie is one of its assets, generally. It's flashy and the technical effects are usually good. But Lucas tries to show scenes we've all lived with in our imaginations for a long time. He has a barroom scene, for instance, which the mundane press equate with those in the old western movies. Lucas knows better: the scene comes directly from 1940's space opera -- the written variety -- in which a bar near a spaceport is filled with a widely-ranging variety of aliens. A great scene -- potentially. But what we see is a bunch of uglies wearing masks -- stock monsters with faces which don't move and eyes which shine with their own light. Cheap. Not up to our imaginations.

Some of the other effects are silly. The space fighters go "whoosh" as they zip past each other in the silent vacuum of space. The explosions -- especially that of the Death Star at the end -- are accompanied by vast sounds, again, an impossibility since sound does not travel in space.

Dumb. There was no reason why essentially the same adventure/quest plot could not have been written without relying so totally upon the long arm of coincidence at every turn. There is no reason why the Bad Guys had to act so stupidly that the good guys were able to win. There is no reason why with the money that Lucas put into the technical aspects of *visualizing* the movie he couldn't have made sure bloopers like those I've cited above were eliminated.

And I haven't even mentioned the acting. With the sole exception of Alec Guinness, who is said to have rewritten his part, the actors in *Star Wars* behave as woodenly as the robots. Mark Hamill pouts his way through the entire film, Carrie Fisher relies largely on smug looks. It's true that they were given nothing to work with, but they fail to bring even *personality* to their roles.

So, okay, it's *fun*. It wasn't meant to make any sense, it wasn't meant to have living interesting characters in it. It's *fun* -- on the level the old Saturday afternoon serials at the Bijou when we were ten were fun.

But does it have to work only on that level? Do we have to suspend all our critical faculties, revert to the standards we had as kids, in order to enjoy a movie?

When is an *adult* science fiction movie going to be made? When is a filmmaker going to bring a respect for intelligence to a science fiction movie? When, indeed, will science fiction ever be successfully translated to the screen? My guess is that it may be never.

--Ted White



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Numerous well known science fiction fans and writers have come away from seeing Star Wars disappointed--and in each case it has simply been because the movie was not the type of movie they had hoped to see.

George Lucas has made the ultimate rollercoaster science fiction movie--it's a fast ride that doesn't get much of anywhere, but the sheer joy of the sensual experience is clearly evident. The same people who were disappointed with Star Wars are mostly the same people who strongly feel that the mass viewing audience could never appreciate a really good, intelligent and imaginative science fiction movie.

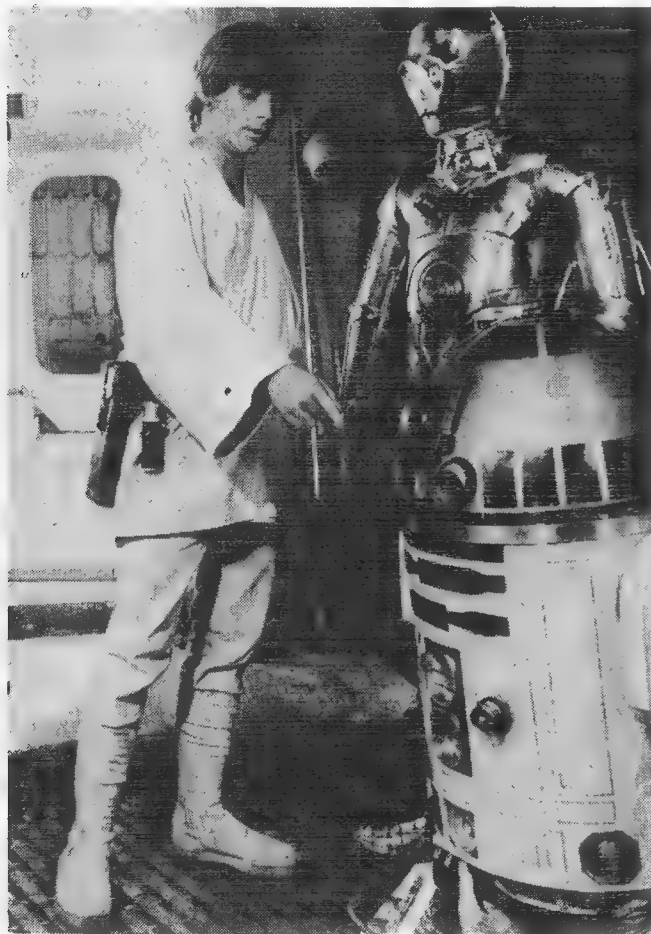
But Star Wars, inconsistencies and all, is making millions. Is George Lucas really so dumb?

I think Lucas knew exactly what he was doing.

One can go on and on about the mistakes in the movie, but in each and every case, except one, these mistakes are really just a liberal stretching of artistic licence in order to enhance the rollercoaster effect.

That one mistake has been gone over and over--the use of the word "parsec" to mean an interval of time. (It was changed from "three parsecs" to "twelve standard timeparts" in the book, by the way.) But hell, I can even come up with a logical explanation of that, if you'll just bear with me a moment.

The scene is in a bar of a spaceport on a backward agricultural planet. Ben Kenobi and Luke Skywalker, looking like backwoods hicks, come in and spread the word they want to commission a space ship. Han Solo is a free-lance hustler with a space ship, and decides to feel the two out to see what he can take them for, if anything. He says, "You mean you've never heard of the Millennium



Falcon?" It's a trick question to flush them out. If they are really hicks, they will try to impress him by saying, "Oh sure, a good ship." when there is no way they could have heard any reputation of a second rate hustler and his second class ship in a galaxy so full of them. Kenobi says, cagily, "Should I?" and avoids the pitfall. Solo tries again by saying, "I made the Kessel run in under three parsecs." There probably is no Kessel run--it's another nonsense question to gauge for reactions. Kenobi doesn't take the bait and ignore the remark, showing a lot more class than it would have shown to openly object to the information, implying that although these shenanigans amuse him, he has important and serious business to transact.

Gives a whole different light to the scene, yes? All nice and logical, and complex too.

I've read lots of other comments on the film. Chip Delaney, in the November 1977 COSMOS remarks unhappily on the lack of any other human race but caucasian. Chip overlooks the fact that at the beginning of the film, it is explained that the whole story takes place in another galaxy, not our own in the future.

Overall, I think Star Wars clearly shows that Lucas may very well one day produce the serious unflawed science fiction movie that most of the detractors of Star Wars long to see.

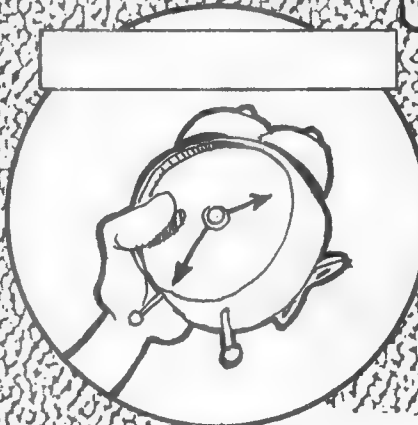
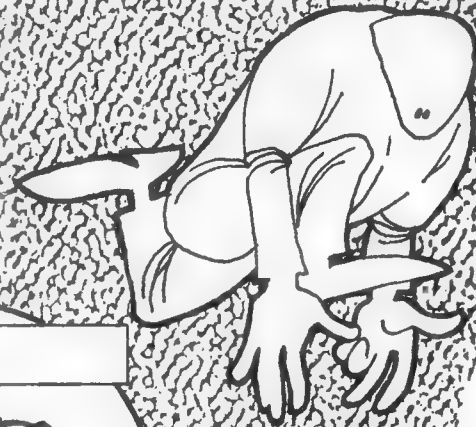
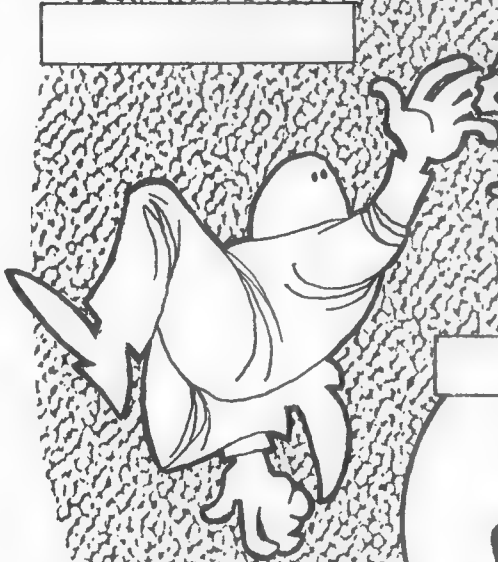
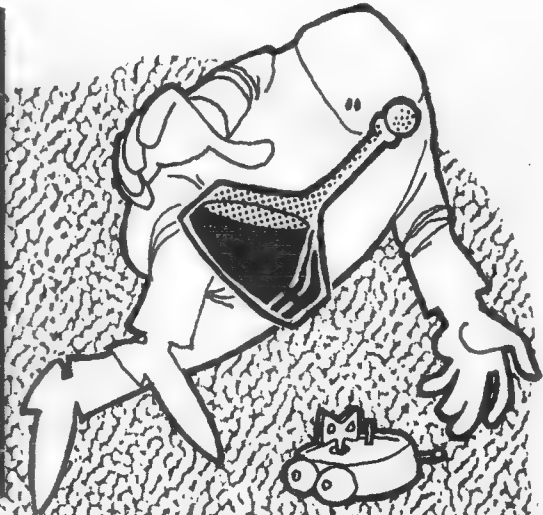
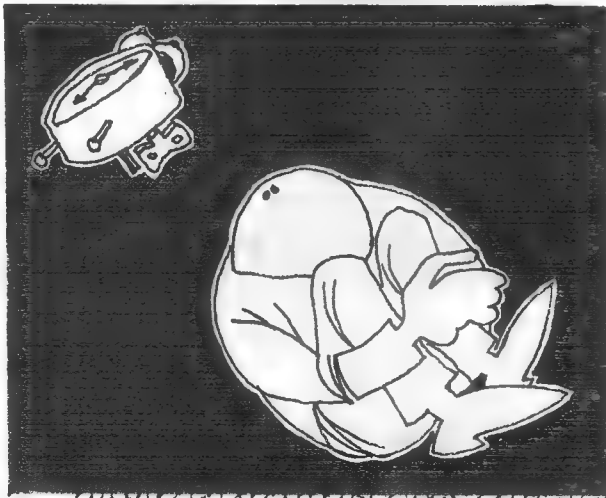
But Lucas decided to have a little fun and make a whole lot of money first. Can you really blame him?

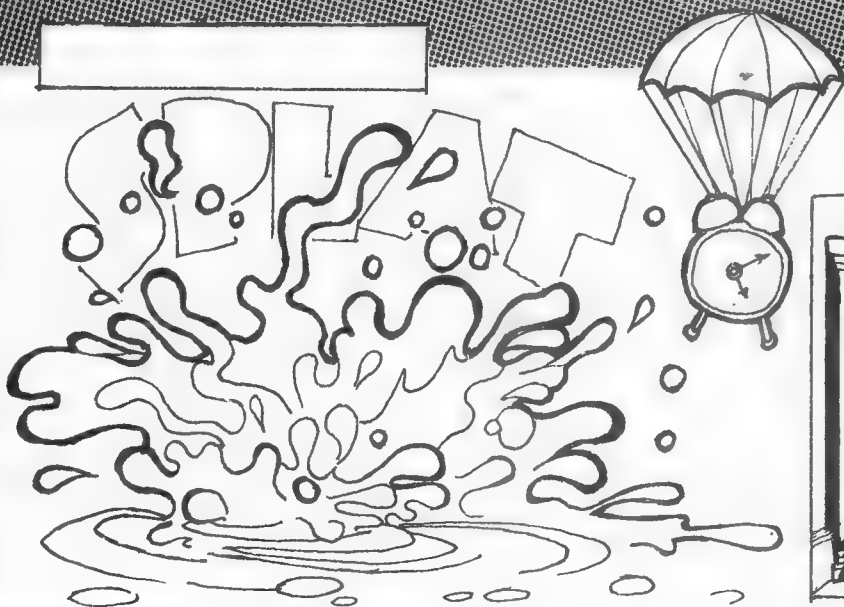
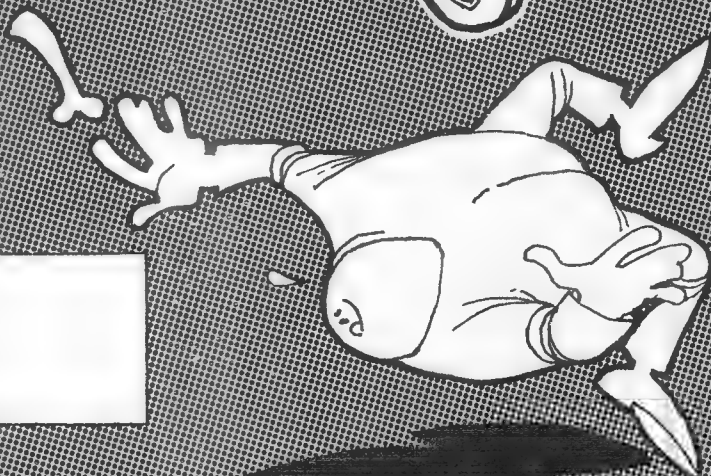
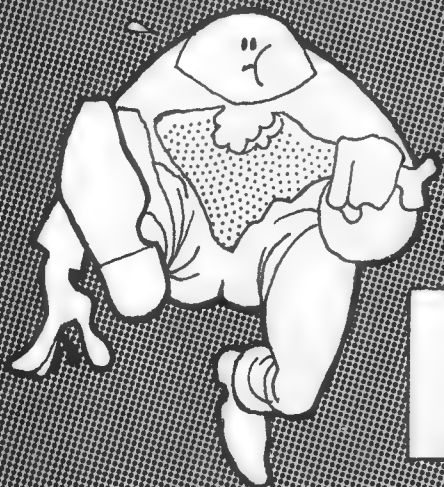
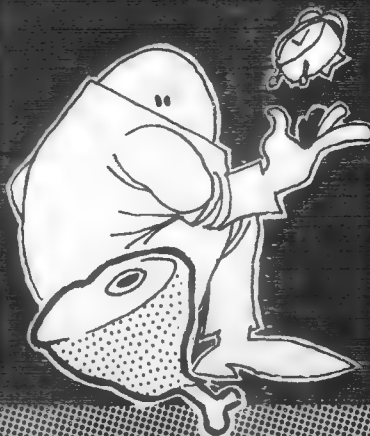
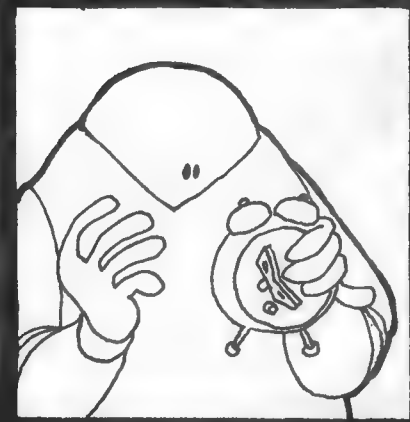
-Doug Fratz



WOMBWITH A VIEW

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Vector is a regular bi-monthly journal of science fiction criticism. Each issue is 32 pages, A4, printed by photo-litho, and contains articles, interviews, reviews and artwork. Regular reviewers include Brian Stableford, John Clute, Ian Watson, Doug Barbour, Cy Chauvin, and Dave Wingrove. Other contributors include: John Brunner, Brian Aldiss, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Silverberg, Ursula Le Guin, J. G. Ballard and Harlan Ellison. Future issues will feature: Michael Moorcock, M. John Harrison, Tom Disch and many others.

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ESSAYING: us and them



dave
bischoff

Harlan Ellison was pissed.

"I resign!" he declared before an assemblage of the Science Fiction Writers of America at their annual Nebula Awards session, this year held in New York City. "I don't care to associate my name any longer with a group of such near-sighted, lug-headed oafs whose scope of ambition for their literature extends only as far as their little insulated world."

Or words to that effect.

Now, it could be maintained (and has been by some SFWA members whose respect for Ellison is limited) that Harlan was merely in a suit because of what had recently occurred in the balloting for the Nebula for Best Dramatic Presentation. Quite simply, the only Presentation that was formally nominated by the members was Harlan's recording for that new and excellent recording company Alternate Worlds, Inc. Wanting some choice for the voters of SFWA, President Andrew Offutt placed two more items on the ballot: Logan's Run, and some other turkey. Along with, or course, No Award. No Award won. The poor year in SF Dramatic Presentations encouraged the SFWA members to take off that category altogether through a straw vote. Somehow, Harlan found out about both before most other SFWA members. His detractors claim he was just pissed that No Award beat him out. Harlan claimed it was mostly because of the decision concerning the Dramatic Presentations, citing the recent No Award as a prime example of SFWA's contempt for other media outlets for science fiction.

I am more inclined toward Harlan's reasoning, and can see his point. He's quit before, then rejoined later. Certainly his departure is SFWA's loss. His reaction to the condition that SFWA is in, indeed to the entire zeitgeist of the science fiction community, is an honest, important reaction to the malaise science fiction has suffered since the 1920's.

It comes from a group of otherwise intelligent and human individuals who have been influenced by science fiction, and hold it dear -- and yet, ironically, have helped to hold it back.

We call ourselves fans.

The arch-villain was Hugo Gernsbach. We hold this man in a revered position in our pantheon of sacred ancestors. After all, wasn't Hugo the guy who started up the first magazine, AMAZING, the periodical that ushered in the golden age of SF, all those wonderful pulps that began building the foundation of modern science fiction?

But, honestly, who needed Gernsbach? Science fiction was hardly new when the man put out the first issue of AMAZING. Gernsbach merely polluted the literary form with his stilted and stupid concepts, and proceeded to categorize it under the tag of "scientifiction," later straightened out to just "science fiction." Unfortunately, the magazine did well enough to eventually warrant imitators. It began a trend that the field has yet to live down. Science fiction was limited to the pulps, those garish, sensational journals of penny-dreadful fiction. Because of its relative youth, the pulps ruined science fiction. They were polo to the literary form, crippling it. The other forms of fiction -- adventure, romance, westerns, detective and mystery, and yes, even fantasy -- were old enough to withstand the disease. Indeed, the pulps even strengthened them, imbuing them with a certain bold vitality, perhaps encouraging readers to seek out their more literate forms in books. But, alas, science fiction had no strong previous connotations of quality in the public mind. And once one brands the image of science fiction as being pulp-magazine frivolous and stupid -- mere sensational entertainment -- into one's mind, it's hard to uproot. Science fiction had very little foundation. The ugly jury-rigged structures on such muddy land have haunted serious-minded advocates of the form for years.

The movies and radio took the evident forms of science fiction at their word: they fashioned celluloid and audial copies of pulp-minded SF.

Basically, because of the pulps, science fiction started out on the wrong foot.

Such worthies as John Campbell, Robert A. Heinlein and the others who managed to fashion good stories out of the murky dreck that science fiction has become, instead of striking out on radically different paths, chose to work with what they had. Also, it might be argued, because at that time science fiction was at best a third-rate form of literary expression, it attracted a similar set of literary talents who were able to advance it only marginally. Campbell, for example. While Campbell was successful in changing science fiction stories into something resembling valid and readable fiction with some resonance of reality, he saddled the field with his own limited ideas of what science fiction should be.

Since then, the evolution of science fiction has been jerky at best. In the sixties it made inroads into respectability. Now, in the seventies, it has arrived.

Science fiction is perhaps the only form of writing these days with an unlimited potential for growth, both in maturity and acceptance by the general public. This fact is mirrored in the popularity of science fiction in both non-print and print media. I won't cite any particular facts -- a scan of a new issue of LOCUS or PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY will bear me out.

And it scares some of us. We don't want to grow up. Who? Why, we who claim to love and support science fiction. We want to keep it to ourselves, proof perfect of our superiority of us compared to them. They are beginning to like science fiction too. They are beginning to pay money for it -- a great deal of money. They are beginning to take notice of it as a valid expression of human drama, as a unique and

satisfying form of literary and cinematic statement. And if *them* are voluntarily destroying this imaginary line we've drawn to separate our small camp from their much larger camp, then how are we going to know who is *them* and who is *us*? They are assimilating *us*, God save *us*, into the popular culture, and we are fighting and kicking and screaming to remain in our little holes.

Like Peter Pan, we won't grow up.

* * *

Where do I get off saying this? How do I dare?

Let me give you an example of a Fan's Progress.

Not necessarily your average fan, but fairly representative of my point.

A nebbishy chap in his early teens, he stumbles upon science fiction and clutches it to his breast. These books aer trapdoors into Wonderlands where no stern parents or cruel friends exist, where the grueling mundane reality is no more. Here is food for imagination, a marvelous preoccupation he can dedicate his thoughts toward for relief from pressing, poorly understood problems. He is in the difficult period of puberty, not yet truly having established a good self-image since having his secure self-centered one of early childhood shattered. He is realizing that he's like everybody else. Reading science fiction, taking it seriously, makes him *different*. It is a new part of his personality that differentiates him from everyone else, the awful mundanes who disdain the form — like his parents. Like his taunting siblings. But this is a reinforcing difference, because reading science fiction makes him feel *superior*. So what if he's fat, or puny and weak, and can't really relate to others in a normal way? Actually, he's better than anybody around him. One day, just like in the stories he reads, the underdog will triumph. The science fiction magazines print editorials telling him he is of some mystical elite, who not only have better IQ's than the scuttlesniff who don't read SF, but are simply better human beings because they have the imagination to read science fiction and most of all to buy this particular magazine. And he swallows the pulpy absurdity whole, takes it to heart, because it builds up his ego. They don't know it, he tells himself as he defiantly builds up his science fiction library, but I'm better than *all* of you!

Now, if he is lucky, all of this will pass. Perhaps somehow the fat will melt, and some cheerleader will jump him from behind the bleachers. He'll get his ego gratification from friendships and relationships, and he'll find other enthusiasms to mold his character. Science fiction might remain an interest, but not a passion.

But this fan is not one of the lucky ones. He clings stubbornly to his papery grail. And eventually, he'll discover that there is a whole subculture of people like him. Fandom. They publish magazines. They correspond. They hold marvelous conventions, where science fiction writers go to bask in well-deserved adulation. Lonely, he will jump gleefully in this iridescent pool of wonder, because these people *understand*. They gratify his social yearnings to some extent, and best of all they are of his own elite sort. He can mingle with people, and still feel different and superior. *Me* versus *them* becomes the easier but much more treacherous *us* versus *them*. He has found his true peers in the lofty Asgardian halls of Fandom. All is well.

Perhaps I overemphasize the negative aspects of this fellow's life. But I suppose I have the right, since I'm basing this on my own experience. I well remember the simple delight of knowing how terrific science fiction was, and knowing that I was one of the few discerning people who read it.

Suffice it to say that I *still* consider myself a fan, and take much pleasure in being one. I don't deny that I get a kick still out of being different in this way. I just think I have a better handle on it than before. I don't feel that I'm anything special now — or that I'm part of any sort of *societe elite*.

What I'm complaining about is the tendency of both science fiction fans and authors to take up that attitude, and cling to it steadfastly. Like a lot of the members of SFWA. Like many fans. The attitude I should like to address here

is that science fiction belongs to *us*. There is an irrational fear that just because science fiction is getting very popular, it is being wrested away from its True Keepers, and it is being destroyed. The unvoiced reasoning here is simplistic: "If my involvement with science fiction makes me different and unique, then if science fiction is read by more people, indeed becomes respectable, then I am no longer different and unique." Obviously, this is unacceptable. So, it becomes: "These new hordes of folks who are reading science fiction like it for the wrong reasons — and probably what they are reading is not *true* science fiction anyway. So I'm still different and so are the members of fandom who agree with me."

The attitude is that true science fiction can never really be popular. Check out Ted White's review of *Star Wars* for an example of this sort of philosophy: "All of these things /writes White, referring to the qualities of good SF/ require an intelligent imagination on the part of the reader if he is to connect with the author's intentions." Who has this much vaunted "intelligent imagination"? Why, we superior fans, of course! And "for this very reason science fiction has never been popular as such with the masses — and probably never can be."

I have read this sort of statement countless times, in science fiction magazines and fanzines. I even remember it running through my mind quite a few times. I don't mean to single Ted out as the prime progenitor of this attitude — it's simply the closest example on hand. And also it helped spur this essay when I read it.

This is a distinctly fannish (and professional) attitude, and one that we must try to deal with. It arises out of personal insecurities, and is the raw stuff from which prejudice is formed. Why do we detest these "masses" so much? Because these are the despised *them* that make *us* unique. We need *them* to make *us* *us*. And when they start getting interested in the things that make *us* different, and the boundary line becomes blurred, that frightens *us*.

Some history as analogy:

In the early nineteenth century, in England, the Industrial Revolution was enriching the land. The middle class was beginning to emerge in great numbers from the mass of commoners. They had money, they had property, they had power — three things that the upper classes had total claim on before. And they began to force themselves into London society, these gross, uncivilized people who were encroaching upon the territory that the upper class previously had total sway over. Disdaining these new rich additions to society, the upper class felt threatened. How could they exclude the *nouveau riche* from true Society? What could be done to distinguish *us* from *them*? The fences of demarcation were crumbling. New ones had to be set up, fast.

What emerged was one of the more ludicrous and fascinating periods of British social history, commonly known today as the "Regency Period," even though the regency of George IV lasted only some ten years of the period's thirty year history (1800-1830). The upper classes fell back onto the one thing that now distinguished them from these upstarts from the rougher classes: their style. Hundreds of years of advanced culture in the upper classes had bred different accents, different manners, and different modes of dress. Not to mention different modes of behavior. By placing the strongest emphasis upon these aspects of their lives, the upper classes who felt their *difference* threatened, who no longer felt special, could exclude the upstarts who were getting into money and property. The key word of the period was *exclusive*. There were exclusive clubs and social places of gathering. There were exclusive modes of dress, and very strict and foolish codes of manners and behavior that the upstarts couldn't possibly crack — or so it was thought. The incredible social mosaics formed by these rules are well-illustrated in the novels of Georgette Heyer concerning those years. But of key importance is the fact that the upper classes who indulged in these marvelous stupidities of behavior did so that they might preserve their difference, their *uniqueness*. The Regency period was a reflection of the basic insecurities the rise of the middle class brewed in the hearts of the upper class.

The parallel is striking. In fact, there are fans who

identify so much with this situation, that there is a whole Georgette Heyer subculture of fandom.

We want to feel exclusive, part of some nebulous clique that makes us feel part of something important, and therefore significant. Indeed, science fiction fandom is a unique phenomenon that has as much to do with human sociology as it does with the actual form of literature it is built up around.

Some specifics, both fannish and professional:

I have a fan friend who refers to non-SF fans as "mundanes." Now where my friend picked up this term I don't know, but I need not detail the connotations that resonate about it. "Mundane" means earthly, of this world. The implication is that we fans are not of this world. That we are some master race or something. Basically, quite often "mundane" is used in its derogatory sense — boring, everyday, blah. And by changing the adjective to a noun, my friend has categorized all non-SF fans into one group, all SF fans into another, and *better* group. *Them* and *us*.

There are the APA's, exclusive groups even amongst fans. Letter-writing cliques, APA's are perhaps the most insular of fan groups. It takes months, often years, of waiting to get into one, and membership in the better ones is considered a sign of prestige.

There are the fanzines, available for all who have the money. These journals are mostly operating on a break-even or loss monetary basis, and constitute an incredible amount of work for their editors. The articles, book reviews, etcetera which compose them are entirely written by fans. Hence, the viewpoints expressed in their pages often work to maintain the status-quo of fannish opinion. The easily influenced neo-fans are molded by the highly opinionated fan editors and writers. It's cyclic.

And there are the conventions. These are the most social outlets for fannish activity, and carry along with them the accoutrements of exclusive societies. And for us iconoclastic fans, it's surprising just how much ridden by tradition your average SF convention is.

There are more specific examples. Think about them. This piece is not meant to outrage, but to stir up thought.

A surprising metamorphosis occurs between SF fandom and prodom. They are intricately intertwined. Perhaps even incestuously so, with all the bad genetic implications. There are an astonishing number of science fiction professionals who started merely as science fiction fans. I'm one of them. Certainly not one of the better examples, but all the same, I was an ardent SF fan at one time — and remain an aficionado to this day.

But what happens in the changeover is that most of us fans turned pros tend to bring along some of our fannish attitudes with us. And so strong is that gravitation of the SF community fans have built up, even new writers who have never heard of fandom tend to get sucked in by the sheer force. We wait in fear and trepidation to see what the

fan-press verdict will be on our writings, yet really don't care what the "mundane" press says. After all, *they* really don't know science fiction, and cannot ever know it. The fact that fan press reviews, with the exception of perhaps LOCUS, make very little difference in the sales of books. And yet most science fiction writers compose stories designed to please the discerning fans rather than the general public. Hence, they limit their own sales. We scream with outrage when a Throne of Saturn or Andromeda Strain hits the bestseller list while our favored authors languish in average-yield paperback originals. And yet most of us don't bother to *write* for those who might not be as familiar with SF conventions.

Then there is SFWA, which is little more than a slightly grown-up fandom. Now, I don't want to denigrate SFWA on the level that Ted White does in the previous issue's interview. Personally, I've found the organization invaluable, and still do.

However, SFWA still seems to be connected to fannish conventions and society by some invisible umbilical. Damon Knight was the man with the industry and foresight to establish the much needed organization. However, one might note that Damon Knight was also the man with the industry and foresight to establish and organize N3F. One could wish that SFWA had more links with the world of professional science fiction and the real world of SF writer's troubles, than it has with the insular world of fandom.

Basically, Harlan Ellison outlined the problem. Most SF professionals are so bound by the past of the genre, that we see it only in terms of past accomplishments and parameters. We sneer at the best-seller list, or other forms of media, and cling to the old.

Isn't it ironic that we who consider ourselves the most imaginative people in the world haven't the perception to see how much of a dead-end future we have if we keep up this way?

Most of us view the recent respectability and popularity of science fiction with some ambivalence. On one hand, it is nice to be recognized. We were right all along — and a lot of people are coming to recognize the fact that science fiction is a vitally important literary expression that has repercussions in areas of life never before touched by literature. However, this new recognition has a price: we lose our unique identities to some extent. We are no longer outcasts. And we realize that we're not that special — and probably never actually were.

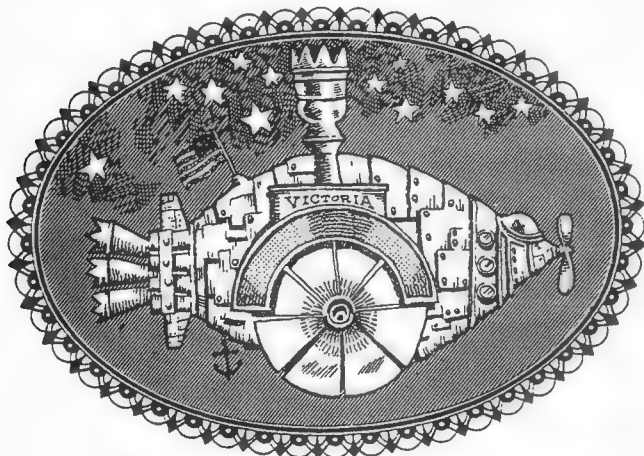
There are the better adjusted fans and writers who have accepted this, and are doing their best to make science fiction more popular amongst the "masses." These people I respect, and would very much like to join. As fans who have known SF most of our lives, it is our duty to see that the best of the spirit of science fiction lives on, despite the faulty attempts of others who are not as familiar with the form. We should accept that science fiction is no longer merely a part of literature, but a part of culture, and all of the media of culture.

But there are those of us who don't want to change. Indeed, I can feel the impulse within myself. How easy it is to simply sit back and chuckle over the stupidity of *them*. How good it makes me feel. How special, how superior.

But I recognize that this feeling arises largely out of my own personal psychological faults, my insecurities. Recognize that by holding this attitude, and expounding on it, by maintaining the insularity of the science fiction community, whether among fans or writers, I am holding science fiction back in its natural growth.

For gradually I am realizing that fandom is not an entirely good thing for science fiction. Just as it has taken years to get in step with society because of its pulpy setbacks, so science fiction has been hurt by those who cling to it as a personal panacea. We must realize that science fiction doesn't belong to only *us*. It belongs to *them*, too. If indeed it has certain properties of importance in cultural evolution, then science fiction belongs to everyone.

Fans are not slans. We are humans, just like everyone else. In not accepting this we not only hurt the art form we love. We hurt ourselves much more.



**I FIND MYSELF
FAVORABLY IMPRESSED
WITH THE PRACTICAL
QUALITY OF THE ADVICE.**
-STEPHEN GOLDIN

**AN EXCELLENT FANZINE
...INTELLIGENT.**
-DAVID GERROLD

VERY IMPRESSIVE.
-GENE WOLFE

**MAGAZINES SUCH AS
YOURS ARE A
VALUABLE TRAINING
GROUND.**
-TOM MONTELEONE

(EDITED BY MARK J MCGARRY)

EMPIRE is a very narrow-minded sort of magazine...and we're proud of it! We focus our attention only on the writing of science fiction: how and why it is done. No reviews, no convention reports, no fannish news and no nonsense. There are plenty of magazines and fanzines that carry that kind of material. We just don't happen to be one of them.

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COUNTER THRUSTS -letters-

Andy Porter
P.O. Box 4175
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I went to the trouble of getting the original manuscripts of seven of Ted's MY COLUMNS for ALGOL out, and went over them. I agree with Ted: on the whole

they stand up well. If I libeled his earlier published columns in ALGOL, I apologize. I've never been one to hedge my personal feelings and when I felt I could no longer run his columns (I'll get to that in a moment) I wrote him a very hard letter -- it took me weeks to think out what I wanted to say -- that is, hard for me to write. But I felt I was completely honest in the letter about my reasons. The last time Ted spoke to me, he said it was "a very fuggheaded letter." But it was an honest letter, I feel, and still do. // What happened was this: ALGOL began as just another fanzine -- an especially bad one, in fact -- and went through a long gestation period before it began to resemble the magazine it is today. In those issues, as I was groping toward an identity to the magazine, I picked up contributors -- Ted and his column, Dick Lupoff and his book reviews (both initially from APA F), a column, GRUT, from Robin Wood which stopped after several issues. For this very neoish ALGOL, the columns were outstanding additions. // But everything changes. Dick Lupoff dropped out of fandom and fannish activities and wrote me about stopping reviewing for ALGOL. I enticed him to stay with the promise of payment for his columns, a policy which spread to all contributors in the space of two issues -- and you know where that's led. Ted's columns, initially reprints from APA F with no relevance to ALGOL, gradually became written directly for ALGOL. And, as ALGOL went offset (in 1969) and then began moving in the direction it's currently traveling in (in 1972, when I started to carry names on the cover, put the price on, began promotion, etc), these columns began to deal with topics relevant to ALGOL's interests. At the same time, three things were happening. How should I put it...ALGOL's circulation was going up (from 500 in 1972 to past 3000 in 1974) and the magazine was reaching more and more people, becoming less and less of a normal "fanzine"; as it reached more and more people, the accepted banter and informality of the fannish fanzine had, I felt, less and less place in ALGOL, as the ratio of fan to reader types declined. And finally, how should I put it, I felt that the path I and ALGOL were treading very slowly, degree by degree, was leaving the path that Ted and his life were in. It's like two spaceships, one of which fires its fuel a fraction of a second later in orbit than the first; by the time both are past the moon, they're thousands of miles apart and slowly getting further away from each other. // I felt that Ted had reached a sort of plateau both professionally and personally, and that ALGOL was

moving further and further away from him. The casual references to people that were acceptable with a circulation of 250 weren't with a circulation of 2500, including dozens of authors and editors; and at the same time whenever I saw Ted at a convention he was surrounded by a clique of fans and they are usually stoned. I'm sorry, but that's the way I, and a lot of other people I know, see it. Ted is locked into the drug culture of the 1960's, from my point of view. I'm very sorry, but that's the way I and other people see him. // Finally, his column (which you printed) reached me, and I felt that Ted had based the column on faulty ground. His "Art Director of AMAZING and FANTASTIC" means that Sol Cohen gives him \$50 to do the covers of AMAZING and FANTASTIC every month (now that the magazines are quarterly, perhaps it's less). Ted is not an art director though; the persona "J. Edwards" is. If Ted were art director, with an art director's responsibilities, he would have the kind of finely designed magazine it's possible to have in a digest format. Look at the Italian ROBOT (copy enclosed) or the Spanish NUEVA DIMENSION for what's possible in a digest-sized format. Or ANALOG, for that matter. Would a professional Art Director use old reproductions of type or strip in the wrong headings (Susan Wood's CLUBHOUSE head when Rich Brown had been doing it for several issues)? These aren't Ted's fault though -- they're probably Sol Cohen being careless. However, an Art Director who's being paid as an art director would see that these things wouldn't happen. He's have the power to do things that Ted obviously doesn't have the power to do. The art directors I work with (who get paid \$25,000 a year) have these powers; I have these powers on ALGOL, with very little budget, but I don't think Ted does. // The line "I've heard of few reputable art agents, and none that I can recommend," was, however, just plain wrong. I stick to that statement. // About the interview: ANALOG, COSMOS, and ASIMOV's all pay 6¢ a word for some material. F&SF will sometimes pay more than 3¢ a word. ALGOL is now buying SF up to 6000 words an issue, and pays 3¢/word. // The amazed legal people I've received comments from have included Joe Hensley, for remarks like "One of those who resigned quietly rejoined (SFWA) shortly thereafter, so that he could run for the office of president in the upcoming election." (From ALGOL #20) It referred to Jerry Pournelle, and he was rather unhappy about it. How about "Harry Harrison...long-time loudmouth..." (#21)...Then I started to edit out the really bad ones. Gee, here's one I overlooked: "For years, authors like Andre Norton and Thomas Burnett Swann have allowed their publishers to rip them off..." (#20). Here's part of a column that never saw print; guess why: "But Lancer was never managed honestly. The royalty statements were a



scandal for years (and in my case never reflected the sales of the later editions -- two years after the 75¢ editions were issued my statements still referred to the 60¢ editions which were, to no one's surprise, not selling at all...) and other aspects of the company (such as its ownership by a distributor) were rather shadey (sic)." From the same column, a slander of Chip Delaney's wife which never saw print: "(In my experience with a poetry magazine she also edited, she relied largely on the efforts of others, for which she took credit.)" I did publish the statement: "...Paperback Library gave Delany a large budget...and he pissed it away." // As ALGOL's circulation increased, such statements were more and more out of place and left me liable to legal action. // It's true Ted got me my job with F&SF, which lasted from 1966 to 1974, when I left to devote all my spare time to ALGOL. It's true that I felt I was one of his best friends, and look back on those years when I first met him, in 1964, to the end of the 1960's and beyond -- till little more than a year ago, in fact -- with a great deal of fond nostalgia and warm memories. I think though that professionally, as ALGOL has evolved and changed, that I took a different course, and my responsibilities to ALGOL and my career got in the way of that friendship. If that makes sense... // I would like to be able to talk to Ted at conventions; I see now that my responsibility to tell the readers of ALGOL what was happening and why Ted was no longer going to be in ALGOL -- for I feel a very strong responsibility to the readership -- should have been tempered, should have been softer. I should have just said that we had a parting of the ways, for that's what I feel it was, and left it at that. But I didn't, and what I said is past, printed and published.

Ted White replies:

In early 1976--within a very few months of the time Andrew Porter rejected my column from ALGOL--Porter called me up to suggest that it might be a good time to collect my columns from ALGOL into an Algol Press book. I agreed. My understanding was that Porter would send me xerox copies of the published columns and I would edit these into appropriate form for the book. Porter discussed his plans for the book with me at least twice, each time phoning me for this purpose.

On May 22, 1976, Porter wrote me a letter in which he rejected the column which appeared here last issue. Of it, he said, "There are things in it I think are untrue--the part about agents for artists, especially." He added, in explanation for why he was dropping the column from future issues of ALGOL, "Response to your column--unless you're being Controversial--remains very small. Even the column

you did in the November issue ((my last for ALGOL, and one which I consider one of my best)) drew less than a dozen comments, and some of those said, 'I never know when Ted is really Telling It Like It Is...' I'm not saying that none of (ALGOL's) growth is due to your contributions--I think you were very important in the transitional days from small circulation genzine to big circulation semi-prozine--but I just have the feeling, the instinct, that now comes the time when your Column is a hindrance rather than a help."

In a period of only two or three months Porter totally reversed himself--from sufficient enthusiasm about the column to consider a collection of past columns, to the decision to drop the column as a "hindrance" to ALGOL. Subsequently he felt the need to inform his readers in the Winter, 1977, issue of ALGOL that the column he rejected contained information which was, he felt, "incorrect, misleading or just plain wrong. Rather than publish material which would only provoke a great deal of ill-feeling and anguished response, I chose to reject it." He then continued with what amounted to a blanket criticism of my past columns--which he had published and had a year earlier considered worth republishing.

I find Porter's justification of his actions disingenuous, to say the least. His reference to the fact that "the accepted banter and informality of the fannish fanzine had, I felt, less and less place in ALGOL," can hardly apply to a column which had, for a matter of years, devoted itself to the professional field--which had, in fact, been aimed at precisely the readership Porter was looking for. (On the other hand, after making a statement like that, how can he justify reprinting James White's "The Exorcists of IF"--a piece which I regard as the best work of fannish writing in the last ten years, but hardly appropriate to the serious approach to science fiction exemplified by ALGOL and Andy's statement here.)

Porter follows this misplaced shot at my column with a series of justifications for his action, ranging in nature from offensively presumptuous to completely erroneous, and concluding with what I feel comes closest to the truth.

His statements concerning the fact that he and ALGOL were "leaving the path that Ted and his life were in (sic)," and that because he had seen me partying it up and enjoying myself at conventions "surrounded by a clique of fans and they were usually stoned," he concluded that "Ted is locked into the drug culture of the 1960's, from my point of view" are amazingly presumptuous, personally offensive to me, and entirely beside the point where my column is concerned. I feel that if he intends to use statements of this nature to justify himself, he is morally impelled to apply the same standards to his other regular contributors--several of

whom, I suspect, would fail to pass muster.

An equally cheap shot is his definition of "art director." He quibbles with my qualifications to call myself "art director" of my magazines because of the lack of control I have over aspects of the magazines' appearance. But, as he is aware, the publisher of any magazine calls the final shots, determines who has what aspects of control, etc., and he is also aware that in the case of my magazines the physical limitations of our publishing schedule and the geographical distance between the Publisher and myself impose limitations on my control over the appearance of the finished product. But I select and assign artists to each story (and work directly with those who are in this area, as I once did with NYC artists when I lived in Brooklyn), and I design and execute the covers. Naturally Porter has complete control over AIGOL's appearance--he publishes it. I had complete control over the appearance of the fanzines I published, too--and they earned for me a reputation for outstanding design and appearance at the time, as well. Porter is also aware that salaried art directors do not exert total control--I gave one such example in the column he rejected: an artist was commissioned by the art director of a major paperback house to do a cover painting, submitted the usual roughs, had one selected, painted it, and the publisher summarily killed it, overriding the decision of the art director. (I can supply the names involved on request; I believe Porter is aware of the incident.) I think that incident illustrates my point adequately; in any case, quibbling over my qualifications to call myself "art director" is a side-issue at best. It hardly invalidates my position as someone who has had art training and has long enjoyed close relationships with a number of the field's best artists.

Closer to the core of the problem is Porter's description of my statement, "I've heard of few reputable art agents, and none that I can recommend" as "just plain wrong." I actually strongly suspect that this single sentence is the sole cause of Porter's editorial statement which I quoted earlier, about "incorrect, misleading or just plain wrong" information supposedly contained in that column. I also suppose that the "ill-feeling and anguished response" is Porter's, and no one else's. Now it should be noted that I said that I'd heard of few reputable art agents. I said I could recommend none. I did not say that there were no reputable art agents. There is a distinct difference between a clearly labelled statement of opinion and a statement of fact. Porter's claim that my statement was "just plain wrong" makes it obvious that he could not distinguish between a statement of opinion and a statement of fact.

Other erroneous justifications for his action can be found in Porter's quotes of my allegedly libelous statements in AIGOL. Now I'm well aware of libel law, having once been sued for \$75,000 for libel (the case was dropped before it went to court). One strong defense in a libel action is truth; another is fair comment. None of the statements Porter quotes are libelous, but if they were his repetition of them would make him equally culpable in a court of law, a fact he disregards.

I note that Porter does not in fact quote any of the "amazed legal people" from whom he claims to have received comments concerning the potentially libelous nature of my columns, and names only one, Joe Hensley. I am curious about what Joe said.

The quotes which Porter does give have been separated from their various contexts and occasionally, as the ellipses indicate, abridged by him. Under the circumstances these quotes appear stronger than they really were. Libel is considered within context. Further, Porter is occasionally very mistaken about the nature of these statements and about whom they concern. His first quote, for example, does not refer to Jerry Pournelle, and the fact that he and apparently Pournelle took it to refer to Pournelle fascinates me. I had no idea... It goes without saying that statements in which no one is named can hardly be considered libelous to anyone. The second quote speaks for itself and I won't comment upon it; my battles with Harrison have been a matter of public record for nine years now. The comments on the practices of Ace Books and Lancer Books

in the sixties also reflect documented matters of public record; it should be noted that Lancer Books, after apparently declaring bankruptcy, began reissuing a number of books under the Magnum imprint without any notification to the authors involved and in violation of the contracts concerned. The fact that Porter cut that portion from my column at the time hardly does him credit. As for the "slander" of Delany's wife, this was another factual statement, but Porter fails to mention the context--that this was a comment on her as an editor (of the Quark paperback series) and not as a poet (for which she is best known). I regard the way in which Porter has presented these statements, these quotes from my published and unpublished columns, as supposedly libelous (or "slandorous") statements to be dishonest on his part.

It should be noted that others among his contributors have made personal statements about authors in the field to which those authors have taken strong and public exception. I don't believe Porter took those statements into consideration when deciding upon the continued appearance in AIGOL of those contributors, and in fact (when one considers his remark to me about the low number of letters my column drew) I believe he approves of such statements when they provoke publishable letters of comment. I think the entire question of libelous statements in my column is a red herring--an excuse thrown out to AIGOL's readers in an attempted justification of Porter's actions.

The truth of the matter comes out in Porter's admission that "my responsibilities to AIGOL and my career got in the way of that friendship" which had previously existed between us for a matter of more than ten years. Porter believed, as I said in my interview, that his career demanded the sacrifice of his friendship with me.

But why? How would his friendship with me affect his career in any negative fashion? What happened in the spring of 1976 which led him to cancel plans for a collection of my AIGOL columns and drop my column from AIGOL? What made him renounce his friendship with me in such hostile tones in AIGOL? The only event of which I am aware is Porter's involvement--as proposed art director (the irony!)--in a planned purchase of AMAZING and FANTASTIC which fell through. I believe this and this alone lies behind Porter's actions toward me. All the rest--my lifestyle, the alleged libel in my columns--seems to me a series of rather lame excuses for what was in fact an inexcusable act: the renunciation of a friend in preparation for taking over a portion of his professional career.

--Ted White

Theodore R. Cogswell
The Institute for

21st Century Studies
Chinchilla, PA 18410

After several weeks snorkling in St. Thomas, I returned to a large carton of accumulated mail. So far I've worked down as far as THRUST. The Ted White article

(sic) confirms what I've always suspected, that if he weren't editor of AMAZING, his SFWA credentials (like those of many of our members) would consist of one sale to AMAZING. By the by, his account of his Milford exclusion is most inaccurate. Virginia was vetoed by the powers that were because her name hadn't appeared on anything. Ted's being persona non grata was for personal rather than professional reasons. If ignored, he had an unfortunate habit of retaliating by sticking his finger down his throat and throwing up on innocent bystanders. // Lovely issue, however--except for the cover. Have you ever seen the Jehovah Witness WATCHTOWER?

/No--doubt I care to. // Find a copy of Ted White's By Furies Possessed, among other things. It may give you further light into Mr. White's credentials.

Dick Lupoff.
3208 Claremont Avenue
Berkeley, CA 93705

Sorry that you disliked Sword of the Demon so much; I find it interesting that the book is generating such strong reactions, both positive and negative. As a contrast, one of my earlier books, Sandworld, drew very mild reactions, positive and negative. Reviewers said things like, "This is a routine adventure yarn with some nice stuff in it, and on the whole I rather enjoyed it." Or, "This is a routine adventure yarn with some nice

stuff in it, but on the whole I didn't really care for it much." Well--and they were right. It was a routine adventure with some nice stuff in it, and it was each reader who happened to react by rather enjoying it or not. Sword of the Demon has had a totally different reaction. Bob Silverberg loved it (see volume 1 number 2, COSMOS). So did Elizabeth Lynn (see SAN FRANCISCO REVIEW OF BOOKS, April 1977.) It also drew a rave from the Virginia Kirkus review --not seen much by the general public, but very influential within the trade. On the other hand, you hated the book, so did Dick Geis, and so did a reviewer in the LA TIMES. See, when people react in a generally similar manner, but wind up deciding that they finally do/don't care for the book (as happened with Sandworld), I find that easy to understand. But when people have the extreme and opposite reactions of, for instance, Silverberg, Lynn and Kirkus as against yourself, Geis and the LA TIMES reviewer...that is very puzzling. VERY puzzling. What do you think? // Thank you for the magazine; the contents look worthwhile and I've long found Ted White one of the more interesting people in the science fiction community.

Gregory Benford
1105 Skyline Drive
Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Chris Lampton's column is fascinating; nobody has set out to discover what makes it in the sf-to-mainstream transition before in this

kind of methodical, thinking out loud way, and I look forward to further discoveries of his. I don't think we must necessarily set out to make it in the mainstream by designing easy books for simple readers, but certainly the ingroup sort of stuff Larry Niven does is over the heads of all but a few insiders. Generally, I think a book that makes it must be in the near-future, if possible. I'd like to imagine that literary quality has something to do with it, but perhaps not. This touches on Dave Bischoff's interesting column. What does *sensa-wunda* mean in the mainstream? Having just written, over a span of eight years, a book trying to make the definitive statement on this, I'll fore-swear generalizations. (The book is In the Ocean of Night, not If the Stars are Gods, though clearly both are related thematically.) But I do think that awe is the key to most sf, and we abandon it for social criticism, etc., at our peril. // The Ted White interview gives a good inside view of Ted, though it should have been longer. True, Ted is neglected as a writer. Even his hack novels (Sideslip, for one) are superior of their kind. He's ignored lately because of publication in his own magazines. ("Junk Patrol" was very good, etc.) But if he holds on, maybe eventually he'll be recognized. That's a major problem with writers--waiting until somebody notices what you're doing, and keeping alive the hope that that day will come. I've been very lucky--I haven't written much, but it's been well received. The whole matter of reception is so double-bladed. Bradbury and now perhaps Ellison are being smothered by their images, their public persona. Perhaps Ted ditto, in reverse, because his image is less favorable in many quarters. That is, he can't get a fair hearing. I think this is true of many writers, really--they're victims of the first impressions they make on their audience. (Unless they promote themselves; nobody would remember Ellison for his first fifteen years of work.)

Tom Montealeone
6544 Tinker Round
Columbia, MD 21045

Thank you for the copy of THRUST#8. It is easily one of the most handsome fanzines being produced today: nice cover by Romero, nice graphics, layout and design, everything has the touch of care about it. As for the contents of the issue and their authors, an initial glance made me feel like I was back in the center of Ted White and my old Falls Church/Greenbelt Writer's Group--"The Vicious Circle." I mean, the only person missing from the group was George Andrew. // Ted White's "My Column" was informative as usual...stemming back to its AIGOL days; but Steffan's artwork on the White interview was disappointing. I am a great admirer of Dan's artwork and I felt that his caricatures of Ted were less than they could have been. // I liked what Chris Lampton is doing with his "Eclectic Company," and look forward to future installments of that

colum. "Essaying" by Dave Bischoff was quite a disappointment, however. It's hard to criticize a good friend, but I would be less than honest if I did not say that I felt Dave's column was appallingly overwritten, with many of the paragraphs bordering on mawkish, Victorian sentimentality. I understand the ideas that David attempted to get across here--I think we've all gone through it to some extent--but maybe he should have read a bit more Laumer and a bit less Shelly. // Thanks for the review of The Time Connection--which was just a modest little adventure yarn, and not intended to be any more than that. I will make sure you receive my next two books (both of which I believe are top-notch productions): The Arts and Beyond from Doubleday, and The Time-Swept City from Popular Library. // Good luck with your very promising publication and watch out for that Red Dye No. 2.

Richard Sewell
Avon Books
Editorial Department
959 Eighth Avenue
New York, NY 10019

I enjoyed reading the book reviews in the Spring 1977 issue of THRUST. In reviewing Piers Anthony's Neq the Sword, Chris Lampton pointed out that this book is, unfortunately, not available in an American edition. I have good news for Chris and other Piers Anthony fans: Avon Books will be publishing Neq the Sword, Sos the Rope and Var the Stick together in one volume. The trilogy, which will be released in January 1978, will be called Battle Circle.

Mike Glicksohn
141 High Park Avenue
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6P 2S3

THRUST 8 isn't quite the heavyweight issue number 7 was, either in terms of appearance or content, but it's a pretty good fanzine nevertheless.

When you don't have to hassle your way through every decision with the club around your neck like the proverbial albatross, I'm going to be extremely interested to see what you do. Porter and Truesdale and Geis had better keep on their toes! Strangely enough, the last fanzine I read and loosed before going through THRUST contained a long editorial about how the editor had been screwed around and over by his former co-editors and would no longer be associated with the fancy-looking offset serconzine he'd been working on. It seems to be reaching epidemic proportions! Two of the many things I've always tried to stay away from are co-edited fanzines and clubzines, except as a contributor. Your experience seems to be about the worst I've heard about, but it's really just an extreme incident of the sort of difficulties that these situations invariably seem to lead into. There always seem to be those around who want part of the notoriety without any of the work (or any of the talent) necessary to earn the glory, and politics always ends up rearing its ugly non-productive head. You're much better off on your own and so, I'm sure, will fandom be. // I've long been an admirer of Ted White's fan work, although I'm not blind to his ideosyncrasies as a columnist, so I'm glad to see his ex-ALGOL column resurrested for THRUST. I know very little about what Ted is writing about here, so it isn't surprising that I didn't spot any of the blatant errors Andy Porter claims caused the column to get bounced from AIGOL. I certainly hope you sent Andy a copy of the issue along with a polite request that he write out the misinformation he felt Ted was guilty of disseminating. (That would have made a nice counterpoint to Ted's column if you'd been able to get it in this issue, but of such unfulfilled possibilities is the Fanzine Graveyard filled!) I can see areas where Ted states a personal opinion as if it were fact (something that he's gotten into a lot of hot water because of, but if he didn't write that way he wouldn't be Ted White) and perhaps it's in these areas that Andy feels Ted is off base. I'll be interested to see the replies to this article to see if others feel Andy was justified in rejecting it and putting Ted down so strongly as he did so. It certainly didn't cause me any "ill-feeling and anguished response," but then I'm not an artist or an art director. // Good interview with Ted as well, and I guess it's an interesting commentary on the way I think of Ted that I'd never really thought about how he must feel about the lack of



critical notice he gets. Ted's so much a fan in my eyes that I hadn't thought of him as having a writer's sensitive ego and need for serious attention from critics. If I can react that way quite inadvertently, it's quite possible that quite a lot of people, even his fellow writers, can also, although his theory of deliberate malice may also be correct. One likes to hope that he's wrong, though; enough of the men we admire because of their contributions to the field are turning out to have feet of clay that I don't want Ted's explanation to be the right one. Of course, there's no way we'll ever know how much of what Ted surmises is accurate. Unless you get some very interesting letters from people like Damon Knight! Ted's comments about cliquishness in SFWA and the meaninglessness of Nebulas as any real token of excellence should stir up a few angry responses! It's this sort of strong personal statement that has gotten Ted his reputation and is almost impossible to prove or disprove, but it certainly makes for provocative material. I'm sure a lot of people will agree with him at least in part (but whether anyone will be able to offer any real evidence to support such claims is unlikely) but as many others will jump on him with hob-nailed boots. And away we go on the wings of another raging controversy! Sense of déjà vu, anyone? // Excellent and powerful Steffan centerfold. Tells a whole story at a glance. Or a hundred different stories. Fans have probably tended to forget that Dan started out as a more "serious" artist and only gradually became a fanish cartoonist and this is a good reminder. // Dave's reminiscences of his childhood and early affairs with the worlds of wonder undoubtedly parallel those of a great many of us. I grew up on English comic books which were half comic strips and half prose stories and although I lacked TV, movies and a plethora of American style magazines and comics that shaped the imagination of my American counterparts, I did well enough on space operas, lost worlds filled with dinosaurs and radio-related trips to Mars to get hooked permanently. Dave's world as a kid was totally different from my own, but he describes it vividly enough that I can almost remember it myself! Yea...I wonder what Mom did with that copy of FF#1...? // Harry needn't worry about ALGOL overinfluencing or discouraging fans. In the many months Andy has been publishing ALGOL in its current form, I've only received a couple of fanzines that even attempt to come close to it in style and preparation (THRUST is one, and the differences between the two are obvious and legion) and there has continued to appear the steady flood of uncomplicated mimeographed fanzines which will likely always be the lifeblood of fanzine fandom.

[Ninety percent of the heated response we both expected I'd be receiving regarding various topics from THRUST #8 just didn't materialize, Mike. The same thing happened to

an even greater extent with issue #7. If I don't get the response I expect from this issue, I think I'm going to start calling people up long distance soliciting response!]

Doug Barbour
Department of English
The University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada T6G 2E1

Your THRUST story is interesting for the background it provides and for the further insights into the kind of backbiting and bickering that even fandom seems

prey to. That aspect of it dovetails nicely with some of the things Ted White says in the excellent interview; although your experience although suggests that it is not necessarily prodrom, or its proximity, which brings about such situations. Since I like Andy Porter and, from his writing for and continued editorship of AMAZING and FANTASTIC, also like Ted White--in a distant way--I am sorry that anything had to go wrong between them. I must confess I don't find anything wrong with Ted's column, and I am basically glad it still has a home. Yet, I think I have a glimmering idea of why Andy may no longer have wanted it; it was interesting to read because Ted cannot really be uninteresting, yet its intended readership is limited in the sense that most of the people who glance at it will not ever become even sf artists, let alone any other kind. That kind of limited appeal may have been one of the factors in Andy's decision. Alas, as we're all human, some less noble ones may have played their part too. Anyway, the interview, because it covered a much larger range of topics, was much more interesting, and it revealed a basically appealing, often complex individual. Some of the memoir-like material dredged up was fascinating. A question: if Ted still writes jazz reviews, where does he do so? Why didn't you ask him about the music; what kind does he like and who? That certainly interests me; if none of the rest of your readers. // I want more said more clearly by Dave Bischoff--maybe next issue. I actually liked the comic strip a lot. Chris Lampton essays the best column of the issue for me, and on the whole I agree with his points. Although Silverberg, Ellison and Malzberg are better writers than the ones who have escaped, they are seen as sf writers, and maybe that's just too tough. But Silverberg anyway, really wanted to break big with an sf novel. Instead Frank Herbert did it.

[I found Ted's column interesting, and I have no intentions of becoming an sf artist. The interview was two and one half hours long, and had to be shortened considerably for publication--I had no choice. Ted talked for about thirty minutes on music; he writes music reviews, mostly on rock, for THE UNICORN TIMES, a local music and arts paper, and for SOUNDS FINE, a locally based rock music collector's paper distributed at la fanzines, nationwide through the mails. I decided to cut most of the music talk; as many of THRUST's readers would be more interested in the talk on science fiction.]

Don D'Amassa
19 Angell Drive
East Providence, RI 02914

I enjoyed the current issue of THRUST very much, particularly the Ted White interview. I found myself in sympathy and/or agreement with every part of the interview except Ted's comment that Stephen King wrote an "Exorcist-type" novel. Although Carrie was packaged to look like an occult novel, it is pure sf--similar in many ways to C.L. Cottlell's "Danger - Child at Large" from Fred Pohl's original anthology series STAR. Carrie is a quite straightforward telekineticist, a point made even more obvious in the movie version. Carrie is a competent, enjoyable, though not very original book, with exceptionally good characterization. The film was less well done, except that Sissy Spacek did an even better job with the characterization than the novel did. There's also a nice touch at the end. King's second novel is a straightforward vampire horror novel, although done on a larger scale than ever before. Although supernatural, it is by no stretch of the imagination Exorcist type. I gather that King's third novel, The Shining, is a ghost story; I haven't read it yet. I suspect that Ted was taken in by the cover of the paperback version of Carrie and the blurbs from the film, which are rather misleading. // I dis-

agree with Chris Lampton on The Prometheus Crisis. I found the novel quite enjoyable. Some of the scenes underneath the project were particularly vivid, and the characterization was at least reasonably well done, though admittedly not spectacular.

[Speaking of Stephen King, as an interesting bit of esoterica, I recently found out that his first published story was in a comics fanzine published by Mike Garrett in Alabama in 1965, and reprinted in 1966 by Marv Wolfman in his comics fanzine STORIES OF SUSPENSE#2. He apparently is the same Stephen King, and was living in Maine at the time the story was written. Unfortunately, that fanzine is one of the few comics fanzines from 1965-1970 I don't have and never did...*sigh* The name of the story was "I Was a Teenage Grave Robber" and if my calculations are correct, Mr. King was eighteen years old at the time of its writing...]

Darrell Schweitzer I see you're entering into the semi-professional area and before long you'll be competing directly with SFR and ALGOL for material and readership.

The thing to do is steer between the two. Both of them are settled in their editorial crochets, and if you provide something different you'll be able to match them in circulation and prestige in no time. Which leads me to suspect that you should have cut loose from the university group long before you did. College magazines are hopeless because they are run by committees of the non-talented. Usually there are only one or two people involved in the things who even have the potential of being a professional. One principle the undergrad editor or writer simply can't understand is that if anything is any good it'll sell to a professional magazine. This statement usually brings outbursts of horror and cries of "hack!" (The way I put it when involved with such a magazine was "If a story is good enough for the New Yorker, it isn't going to turn up here, unless the author is a fool. However, this has yet to happen.") Anyway, I think you could have saved yourself a lot of grief by simply pulling out and starting another magazine, taking with you as much of your staff as cared to go. (Unless they have special skills or can do the donkey work, staffs are unnecessary. Magazines like this, by their very nature are not democratic institutions. The editor should have absolute control.) The title THRUST still isn't well known enough in fandom to be of importance, and it was even less known then. Hey, I notice that the Bischoff/Lampton story in THRUST#4 got reprinted professionally in VOID#1, the Aussie prozine. What does that do to my dictum about the story good enough for the NEW YORKER? // Ted White's column was interesting and hardly controversial. Porter certainly wasn't smart to turn it down. As for Ted's fiction, I imagine the reason it isn't recognized is where it has appeared: most of it has been in AMAZING and FANTASTIC. These are the least circulated magazines in the field (in this country at least) and many fans read all the rest but skip these two. And publication there has a certain "vanity" stigma. You know they're worthwhile stories, and I know it, but there are lots of other people who don't, especially those who have something against Ted and are looking for an excuse to ignore his fictional output. Then there was a story in VERTEX. Again a loser. Who read VERTEX, even among the few who could find it? I gave up on the magazine very quickly when they consistently published stories at 4¢ a word I wouldn't have taken for free in a fanzine. (I don't mean Ted's either, mostly short-shorts by such non-entities as Herman Wrede and Terri Pinkard.) So publication there is hardly going to bring fame. Some of John Varley's early stories were published there (there was some good stuff among the dreck) but nobody noticed him until he started to sell elsewhere. Roger Elwood anthologies are another dead end. An awful lot of people learned not to read anything with Elwood's name on it (notice that the latest, Future Love, from Bobbs Merrill advertises the Cordy Dickson intro in large letters, but there's no mention of Elwood anywhere but the copyright page--even he's learned that people avoid him,) and of those who do, what's their chance of reading any given Elwood book? There is little doubt why,

even when Elwood constituted 50% of the field, only once did a story from one of his things ever get on an award ballot. (Farmer's "After King Kong Fell." Nebula. It lost.) A story in an Elwood anthology gets lost in the mass of Elwood anthologies, and is not read by a large segment of the science fiction community, where it would be read if published in, say, F&SF. Many people read every issue of F&SF. But who reads every Elwood anthology? So between AMAZING, VERTEX and Elwood, Ted has yet to achieve major publication. If, as he seems to imply, many of the major editors (Damon Knight, the editors of other prozines) are for some reason prejudiced against him, his best bet would be to adopt a pseudonym and work through a post office box like James Tip-tree/Alice Sheldon. Then, once many of his stories are published, reveal who he is and have the last laugh. He also could pick up more of a reputation if he'd get back to writing novels, or could have his old Lancer titles reprinted. Nobody is forgotten faster than someone whose books are all out of print.

Arthur D. Hlavaty
250 Coligni Avenue
New Rochelle, NY 10801

I think that Chris Lampton misses one important point when he says that Jakes, Scottia and Robinson and Koontz all managed to succeed in the mainstream in spite of being card-carrying sf writers. These writers all had popular, rather than critical successes. I would suspect that The Bastard, being a paperback original, was hardly reviewed at all when it came out. In fact, there are identified science fiction books, like the Dune books, Imperial Earth and Dhalgren, which are doing comparably well. Surely the mass audience rarely knows which writers have previously committed science fiction, and don't care when they do know. But Silverberg, Ellison and Malzberg wanted/want critical success, and that's a bit trickier. Often mainstream critics come equipped with little pigeonholes in their heads, which enable them to say, "Oh, yes, that science fiction writer. Do I have any serious writers to review?" But even that may be changing. Ursula LeGuin managed to be nominated for a National Book Award, for Orsinian Tales, in spite of her sordid (sf) past.

[WE ALSO HEARD FROM: Lou Stathis (949 West End Ave. PhB, New York, NY 10025) who wrote an excellent 1500 word letter which I really would have printed in its entirety if I had the space. John Thiel (30 N. 19th Street, Lafayette, IN 47904) who writes another of his long off-the-wall letters. Don McDonald (Box 538, Brookings, OR 97415) who liked "The Alienated Critic" but thinks I should change the name of THRUST to something else. // That's it. Honest to ghod. Every letter I received was printable. The letters of comment for THRUST continue to be low in quantity but high in quality.]





REVIEWS

WEIRD HEROES, VOLS. I & II, edited by Byron Preiss (Pyramid, 1975, \$1.50)

WEIRD HEROES, VOL. III, QUEST OF THE GYPSY by Ron Goulart (Pyramid, 1976, \$1.50)

WEIRD HEROES, VOL. IV, NIGHTSHADE by Tappan King and Bath Meacham (Pyramid, 1976, \$1.50)

WEIRD HEROES, VOL. V, THE OZ ENCOUNTER by Marv Wolfman from an idea by Ted White (Pyramid, 1977, \$1.50)

WEIRD HEROES, VOL. VI, edited by Byron Preiss (Pyramid, 1977, \$1.75)

Grudgingly, I will commend editor Byron Preiss for the idea behind the Weird Heroes series (assuming, of course, that the idea was his). According to his introductions to the volumes he "developed" the series to provide a starving reading public with old-fashioned heroes, the kind found in the golden age of the pulp magazines, but updated to exclude such unfashionable stuff as racism and violence (no Tales of the Yellow Puerile here, folks!). Preiss' efforts to recapture some of the innocent fun of heroic adventure (lost somewhere in the Fabulous Sixties) and enhance them with some superior graphics, though an admirable one, is certainly not original. It's been done before, but Preiss' contrivance seems to be his energy, money and organizational ability. Unquestionably, these books have been assembled with care, but I think in his editorial judgment, Preiss slips up.

All six volumes that have so far seen release have been exceptionally well-designed. The covers, though somewhat crowded, are striking and attractive. The interior design, by Anthony Basile, is boldly modern, lending the books a clean graphic look. The use of individual logos to mark each story (and their use as running heads in the sixth volume) is an especially nice touch. With the personal introductions and notes by the authors the books make an effort, and succeed I think, at capturing the spirit of the pulp magazine (and showing what makes a periodical superior to just a collection of stories). The books have good quality offset printing (most paperbacks are letterpress, a process in which rubber plates stamp out the pages) enabling them to contain fine-lined illustrations, and Preiss has assembled a formidable crew of artists. The results have ranged from the magnificent (Steve Fabian's Doc Phoenix drawings and Alex Nino's numerous contributions) to the dull (Dave Sheridan's stiff sketches for Volume I's "Stalker" and Rudy Nebres' work for the Nightshade volume). Most of the illustrators featured in the series have come from the comic world (Nino, Neal Adams, Staranko, Ralph Reese) and though I don't mean that as any criticism of their abilities, it indicates to me where Preiss's head seems to be at. You see, the weakest part of the series so far has been the lackluster writing and poor plot/idea development shown by the stories' authors. By extrapolation, Preiss' editorial ability is also suspect. The same problem exists in the comics world these days: all the talent is in the illustrating. Except for a meagre few (Roy Thomas is one, and on a good day, Steve Englehart) writers of comic scripts today are an uninspired lot. Doesn't it make sense that if one goes seeking the best illustrating talent, one should also go seeking the best writing talent, even though the two may not exist in the same place? And further, once you've found

the talent, should you settle for an unsatisfactory product? What excuse can there be for Elliot Maggin's stylistically offensive and villainously over-hyped "gonzo storytelling" disaster, "SPV 166: The Underground Express" from Volume II (really little more than a screenplay or a comic script)? This story to me typified what's wrong with most current comic writing: all style and no substance, words without meaning, lots of noise and a minimum of new ideas. Wasn't Preiss aware of the paucity of invention in this ridiculously unbelievable melodrama? Was he also unaware that Philip Jose Farmer is capable of producing much better work than the belabored, first-draft toss-off Greatheart Silver stories? Was he ignorant of the inappropriateness of Joann Kobin's decidedly unheroic "Rose of the Sunshine State" to the collection of stories that contained it? Was he so conceited as to think that his readers would accept without question a story that existed totally outside his own plainly stated criteria? Never mind that the story is the best written piece in Volume I, it just doesn't belong in pulp fiction collection.

Of the eleven stories in the first two volumes, the one that appealed to me the most was Ted White's "Doc Phoenix" from Volume II. The idea of a character who enters the mind to battle forces of interior torment seemed a marvelous one. Borrowed, admittedly, from Roger Zelazny's Nebula-winning "He Who Shapes" (in novel form as The Dream Master from Ace, a book I found unreadable), but molded from a conception far different from Zelazny's: a Doc Savage-esque pulp hero complete with a secret headquarters and an engaging crew of assistants. The story had mystery, adventure, wonder and a fluidly intangible atmosphere. It embodied to me what Preiss seemed to be aiming for: the truly believable modern pulp hero. Ted started work on a Doc Phoenix novel, called The Oz Encounter, about Doc's trip into the warped Oz fantasy that dominated the mind of a comatose young girl. After about fifty pages he burned out. In his introduction to the volume, Preiss outlines the reasons why Ted couldn't finish the book. From what I know of the circumstances I think that the real reason for Ted's failure to complete it, despite the validity of all external distractions, was his boredom with the drudgery of writing a book for which he had already expended the creative energy. The moment of the Creative Event had passed, and once the vision of Doc Phoenix and his world had been realized, the thrill dissipated. I've read the pages that Ted wrote for the novel, and to me they lack something — a spark, — that the original story had. These days Ted is more interested in music than he is in writing science fiction. He has said that there is no more challenge for him in sf, that he's done it already and there are other things he'd prefer to do. I don't think he had his heart in the novel and it shows in the writing. It's therefore not surprising that he couldn't finish it. I find it perfectly understandable, and I suppose I respect him a bit for not playing the hack and plowing ahead without caring about the result (I'm assuming he could've done this). Instead, the final product comes to us as: "a novel by Marv Wolfman based on an idea by Ted White." Whether Ted could've done a better job is a pointless question (and I think it's obvious where my prejudices lie), but left to stand on its own, Marv Wolfman's The Oz Encounter is a shoddy book.

I've read little of Wolfman's comic writing. He neither writes the kind of comic I like to read (the more science oriented books), nor does he happen to write any of the few superhero books that I follow. Consequently I can't say what his graphic story style is like, but unfortunately the

aesthetic he brings to novel writing is that of the pulp/ comic hack. The prose is styleless: the words ring flat. They have neither grace nor life. Cliches are overused: a grip is "vise-like," and a face turns "beet-red." There is a minimum of descriptive detail which is fine if you've got visuals to rely on, but only increases the air of superficial non-reality in a novel set in a fantasy landscape. The dialogue is unspeakably false. Characters curse and rant in hilariously inept B-movie fashion: "When I get up, you slippery-fingered creep, I'm gonna take one of my test tubes and shove it where the sun don't shine — right up your nose into that pinprick you laughingly call a brain!" Or: "Went-worth? Bah! That fool is unimportant now. The only thing important is killing you and getting Phoenix's machines. Then I can't be stopped. Gaut! Get her! Crush her!" Slop like that turns my tender stomach. Wolfman's ideas of plot movement are also mired in comic book tricksterism. There's plenty of fighting, and while damage supposedly results the reader never feels it, he only has it told to him. You never believe it. In one particularly violent fight sequence, Moose Moynihan, one of Doc's entourage, is being beaten to a pulp. First, in a darkened office, Moose finds a crowbar conveniently within his reach. Then, while a great deal of physical damage is apparently being done to him (he winds up in the hospital after it's over, badly hurt), his mind "wanders," allowing Wolfman to cleverly inform the reader of events that have brought Moose into that encounter. He also takes the opportunity to let us in on Moose's thoughts about certain matters that the man has no need to think about, the reason he does, of course, being that the reader must be informed of these things. Does Wolfman expect us to believe that someone in the process of getting his skull re-decorated would calmly review and mull over recent occurrences? Only comic book superheroes do that, I suppose it saves space. Comic writers are enamored of this cheap gimmick because it allows a seventeen page book to get right down to the required bloodletting without wasting a panel. This way they can jam in as much fighting as they can in order to please Stan Lee and the adolescents who eat that shit up. But Wolfman isn't writing Doc Phoenix for adolescents, or so I would hope (has he forgotten how *not* to?). Nor is he under any space limitations (again, I hope). Perhaps he was a bit pressed for time, but I consider that a poor excuse if that's so. Granted, Wolfman might have heroically jumped into the breach to save Preiss' neck, but it still is, despite any trying circumstances, both author and editor's job to provide us with the best entertainment they can offer. And at a buck and a half, the cheap melodrama of The Oz Encounter just doesn't make it.

Praise is in order, however, for the physical appearance of the book. The cover is less cluttered than past volumes have been, and the vertical band of lettering on the right side is an effective identifying mark for the series. The novel's title, arranged in a large triangular section in the upper left-hand corner (like half of a diagonally cut square) is distinctive, but I find it crowding Jeff Jones' illustration. I suspect Jeff was unaware of the typographical layout of the cover when he painted it. Though I admire the painting and the skill involved in creating it, it fails to convey to me the proper atmosphere of the book. Steve Fabian's interior work does a much better job of that, and I think the plate used both in Volume II and on the last page of this volume would've made a better cover. It captures something essential to the book in the fearless stance of Phoenix against the twisted landscape in the background, something that Jones' cover misses. Fabian's sixteen black-and-white drawings, spread throughout the novel are, as far as I'm concerned, the best part of the book. They are the only things here worth turning the pages for.

Judging by Volume VI, an anthology released as I was writing this review, there is a good deal of hope for the Weird Heroes series. It includes more of the usual Goulart (wacky ideas wrapped in barely functional prose), more over-weighted Greatheart Silver that I found impossible to finish, a good, ramblingly nostalgic essay by Edmond Hamilton about his pulp writing years (great Nino illustrations accompany it), a strange and intermittently interesting detective story by Arthur Byron Cover and, the prize of the vo-

lume, an excellent short by Ben Bova (with some uneven illustrations by Craig Russell who is capable of better). The series will go on, and hopefully it will improve. Preiss must learn to pick and choose his material, not just settle for what comes his way. Weird Heroes is the perfect home for all the artists of delicate sensibilities that are burned out by the mercilessly overdriving comic industry (some recent examples include Russell, Barry Smith, Jeff Jones, Jim Starlin, Berni Wrightson — no coincidence that these are also the best in the business). It is also the right place for writers to develop a new school of modern heroic fiction. The talent is out there, no question about it. The Oz Encounter is better off forgotten, though my fondness for Doc Phoenix is undiminished. It could be that Ted, or some other writer worth his salt, will resurrect The Man Who Enters The Mind and put him into a story worthy of the character's potential. We'll see.

—Lou Stathis

THE OPHIUCHI HOTLINE by John Varley (Dial Press, 1977, \$6.95)

Lester del Rey, in the September 1977 ANALOG, gives this book, John Varley's first published novel, a this-book-simply-isn't-worth-reading review. He characterizes the book as a "kitchen sink sort of story" and a "disappointing book by a good writer."

Lester is dead wrong, folks.

The Ophiuchi Hotline is an extremely complex and ambitious novel. One sometimes can feel Varley in the background straining with every bit of his skill to keep the narrative from getting out of hand and the plotline hopelessly entangled.

The book is crammed full of the beautifully brilliant ideas one expects from Varley on the strength of his numerous short stories. There are the ultimately intelligent aliens from a Jupiter-like planet who drive human civilization off Earth, an alien race who beams scientific information to the humans, and a huge splattering of examples of the technology formed from this information, the main example being a method of cloning and memory recording and transference which allows Varley to have several copies of his main characters involved in separate plots, only later to intertwine.

There are a few ambiguities near the end, I think. For some reason never explained, the numerous clones of the female protagonist start telepathically sharing memories. Also, I think I found a clear-cut mistake. On page 174, one of the female clones, upon seeing one of the clones of the male protagonist says, "You don't recognize me? The last time you saw me, I was falling into Jupiter." However, it was the other male clone that saw her fall into Jupiter, not the one she was talking to. I think...

It's all very complicated to follow and it's not light reading, but it's a fascinating, fast paced story, and well worth the reading, and well worth looking forward to future novels by the always interesting John Varley.

—Doug Fratz

CIRQUE by Terry Carr (Bobbs-Merrill, 1977)

Some time last year, I walked into my neighborhood book store and spotted the latest in the "Harlan Ellison Discovery Series." Ellison's track record hasn't been so good — a mediocre novel by James Sutherland and an embarrassing piece of pseudo-surrealism by Arthur Byron Cover — but I was prepared to buy it anyway in a gesture of solidarity to all struggling writers everywhere. Then I noticed that it wasn't by a struggling writer, but a collection of short stories by a long-established pro. My flare of temper only lasted about ten seconds. It's true that Terry Carr is nobody's discovery, but it is also true that there has never been a collection of his short fiction. Carr shorts are few and far between, but when I thought about it, a surprising number of titles came to mind. They tend to stick with you. I opened the book (The Light at the End of the Universe), and there they all were, all my favorites. It slowly oc-

curred to me at I liked all of them that I remembered. The fact that he writes about one a year had managed to obscure his talent for me, though I'll never forget "The Dance of the Changer and the Three." But this isn't about that book; if you've got any sense, you've already picked it up and read it. I forgave Ellison for all those manuscripts by starving authors collecting dust in his desk drawer.

Now we have a novel by Terry Carr: Cirque. It has managed to slip unobtrusively onto the shelves with little or no fanfare. I bought it. I read it. I waited for a long time for all those glowing reviews, the token mention in The New York Times Book Review, the fansines endlessly dissecting sub-themes, all of the sturm und drang that normally accompanies a major work by a major author. I heard nothing but silence. So I am making the effort, and picking up the drum myself.

This is a hard book to review. If it were merely pretty good, I could tear apart the flaws and magnanimously state that it was a decent read in spite of it all. It is very hard to praise a book at length without lapsing into an annoying evangelism. Cirque is a perfect illustration of that fashionable book-reviewer's catch-phrase: the tour-de-force.

Cirque is a city in the far-distant future built on the banks of a tremendous chasm known only as the Abyss (A flaw! A flaw! If the Abyss is as bottomless as is implied, then why do we discover fairly quickly that it is "only" 900 meters deep?). The story concerns the events surrounding the Eruption from the Abyss, and its effects on the lives of a small group of people (and, by extension, all of civilization). From this foundation, Carr has constructed a spare and elegant plot that reads organically, as if it developed naturally out of the characters, rather than the exigencies of storytelling.

The people in the book are textbook examples of the art of fleshing a character into a human being using a minimum of description, and relying almost entirely on conversation that rarely devolves into exposition. There is a sense of rightness about everything these people say or do that makes them come alive, and propels the story without any seeming effort. These are people that you will not forget, from Nikki, slipping from one facet of her personality into another, to Salamander II, and her religious convictions and role as High Priestess of the Church of the Five Elements, to Robin, the contrary school-girl "practicing her negatives" (in whom Carr has demonstrated as so few writers have the true dignity of a child, without sacrificing any of her childishness). But my favorite character has to be the millipede from Aldebaran. It is a tourist arrived to watch the Eruption, and spends a large part of the book floating down the River Fundament with Nikki and Robin. It is able to remember the future as easily as the past, a talent shared by all of the thousands of races in the galactic community, except for humans, thus making us an object of confusion and wonder to the millipede. During their journey, the millipede tells Nikki and Robin that:

"You have two important words in your language, *how* and *why*. They are the greatest examples of your race's creativity, for you have made two ideas from only one."

(Oh no! Another flaw. If, as is given, the millipede is unable to grasp the idea of number — a purely human concept, based on our faulty understanding of causality — then how can it conceive of "...two ideas from only one"? I don't want to find flaws in this lovely little book.)

Then there is the monitor, in retrospect, one of the most fascinating characters in the book. She is a "holistic telepath" who simultaneously experiences everything everyone else in the city is experiencing (and, thus, has little personality of her own). Her job is to pick out the most interesting experience at any given moment and to broadcast it to the rest of the city, sort of like a continuous newscast that people learn from birth to tune in and out at will. But the function of the monitor is much deeper than that of Walter Cronkite.

Cirque is a treasure-trove of perfect gems of extrapolation and conceptualization. My sense of wonder flared up from a long dormancy when confronted by "stellar inertia" and fire sculpture. You can breeze through the book in an hour and not realize until later just how much strange cul-

ture and brand-new ideas (or variations) you have absorbed.

Thematically, the book is reminiscent of some of Hesse, a low-key and powerful Zen allegory, if you wish to read it that deeply. The book will take you where you want to go, fun for the whole family. And he ties it all together with a glorious ending that transforms the book from a lovely parable into a grand and beautiful metaphor.

I envy those who read it for the first time. I am jealous of those who will experience the giggling fit between the millipede and Nikki, or who will encounter the marvelous steam doll. I wish that I could forget it all so that I could read it again with that same feeling of happy disco-very.

I had better stop while I'm ahead; people tend to become suspicious of overly-strong endorsements. Let's just say that I found it the finest and most enjoyable (not often enough the same book) SF novel that I've read in years. It is a perfect example of what science-fiction is supposed to be, and it will make you feel good when you read it.

--Steve Brown

CHARLES FORT NEVER MENTIONED WOMBATS by Gene DeWeese and Robert Coulson (Doubleday, 1977, \$6.95)

This is Gene's and Bob's cute little science fiction novel about science fiction fans. It's a bit far-fetched all the way through, but has a lot of interesting ideas and characters--and the fans in it really are slams!

The story takes place at the Worldcon in Australia, and is not easily synopsisized, except to say that an alien "invasion" is halted by a haphazard combination of fans with strange talents and powers and the fans' lackadaisical attitudes towards totally strange occurrences.

The book is good light reading, and any fan who's been around fandom long enough to appreciate the strangeness that is fans will find this book good for numerous pleasant giggles.

--Doug Fratz

A HERITAGE OF STARS by Clifford D. Simak. (Berkley Publishing Corp., 1977, \$7.95)

When reading science fiction, it is not unusual to have a sense of *deja-vu*. There are many stock plots which have been rehashed many times. In the case of A HERITAGE OF STARS by Clifford Simak, it is more than *deja-vu* if you have ever read The Enchanted Pilgrimage by the same author. From the very beginning A HERITAGE OF STARS seems very familiar. It is years in the future. Civilization has collapsed. Tom Cushing is a young man who happens to live in what may be the last university. There he finds some unpublished notes of an ancient historian who told of the Place of Going to the Stars. So, Tom sets out for this legendary place. The first companion he picks up is Meg, who has minor psychic powers and is considered a witch. His next companion is what may be the last robot. Then there is the man who communicates with plants and his daughter, who does have psychic powers. Does it seem familiar yet? No, the characters are not exactly the same, but the plot is very familiar. There are some very strange things in this book. Raccoons whicker. There are mobile living rocks. Why can they move? To what purpose do they move? There are intelligent trees, shimmering ghostlike snakes, all kinds of primitive tribes and the Place of Going to the Stars.

But Simak depends heavily upon coincidence and *deus ex machina*. For example, Tom manages to make friends with the last surviving robot. All the other robots were destroyed when humanity rebelled against technology. Then of course, Tom was the one who found the original notes, which had lain undisturbed for centuries. Simak seems to employ the method of the protagonist discovering some hidden notes in order to set events into motion quite a bit. When he sets out, Tom has no idea of where The Place of Going to the Stars is. However, he and Meg are almost caught by marauding tribesmen but the tribes-

men are frightened off at the last minute, leaving a lot of their belongings behind. Among their discarded belongings are maps which show Tom the way. Then, when the maps are not precise enough, the robot suddenly remembers someone told him where The Place of Going to the Stars is. Coincidence is one thing, but this stretches credulity. Finally, when Tom's party is confronted by hostile tribesmen, a grizzly bear attacks, scaring away the tribesmen. At this point, it starts becoming somewhat ridiculous. It is very contrived.

Clifford Simak is very comfortable with the pilgrim motif. It is a very old literary device and has been used often enough. The hero, by some chain of circumstances, is compelled to go from point A to point B. Along the way, he has all sorts of adventures and encounters all kinds of people and wondrous things. Very often, this device is used to tie together a series of short stories into a novel, since each chapter does not have to flow from the preceding chapter. One of the best known forms of literature to utilize this device is the chilvaric quest idea. Clifford Simak does a fairly good job with the motif and its built-in disadvantages. The characters are flat and two-dimensional. The action is so swift and furious, that the plot suffers enough to cause A HERITAGE OF STARS to seem to be a juvenile. Finally Simak leaves loose ends all over the place and the ending is unlikely. Despite a great deal of action, there is very little conflict, never any doubt that the hero will reach his goal. More fantasy than science fiction, either A HERITAGE OF STARS or Enchanted Pilgrimage will do very well in helping a ten-year-old to while away a lazy summer afternoon. Though maybe not intended as such, they are fairly good, when considered as juveniles. With the similarities in plot, buy either one or the other for your child's library, but not both.

-Wayne Hooks

MAN PLUS by Frederik Pohl (Random House, 1976, \$6.95)

Man Plus is the well written and excellently characterized story of the biological adaption of the first man for life on Mars. It is, in short, a must-read book by one of the field's most competent writers.

I read this book just after it won the Nebula Award, and I must admit that through most of the book I had my doubts. The necessity of getting a man on Mars to ease the political and sociological tensions on Earth seemed rather dubious at best.

Then I reached the end of the book.

And I changed my mind.

Throughout the book in various places there is thrown in pieces of narration, sometimes just single sentences, which are in first person plural. I thought that some sort of secret government watchdog security team must be narrating the book. I was wrong. When the reader finds out at the end who is narrating, it changes the complexion of everything that went before.

If you haven't read this book, do so now.

-Doug Fratz

ANOTHER WORLD, edited by Gardner Dozois (Follet, 1977, \$7.95)

Another World, Gardner Dozois' collection of short stories by well-known authors, is earmarked by competent, workmanlike prose by distinguished professionals. Most of the stories are aimed at the beginning SF fan -- but all are suitable for general readers, too. It's fine reading to relax with after work, or between TV shows at home. You may not find any classics here -- or even, for that matter, any award-winners -- but don't be alarmed. The stories are good nevertheless, and far above average.

I want to summarize my feelings on one story -- the best, in my opinion -- Ursula K. LeGuin's. Her poetic novelette, "The Stars Below," is a multi-levelled SF adven-

ture, centered around a sensitive, meaningful theme. Her tale is quite touching -- especially the lovely character portrait of Guennar, a fugitive Galileo.

In general, LeGuin's short stories offer a creative mélange of characters and plots -- the latter pregnant with Meaning and Significance, and stylistically rendered. Often, however, her stories get bogged down by overly descriptive background. Despite this, "The Stars Below" is an excellent yarn.

In closing, suffice it to say that LeGuin's story is worth the book's cover price. The rest of Dozois' collection is also worthwhile. Recommended.

-John DiPrete

THE BEST FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD: EUROPEAN SCIENCE FICTION edited by Donald Wollheim (Doubleday, 1976, \$7.95)

This anthology is a rather interesting collection of fourteen stories by science fiction authors from nine different European countries. The stories range widely in style and content, including a story by Gerard Klein (France) exhibiting a typical Bradbury-like awe of simple technology (the telephone), a heavily flawed hard science story by Jon Bing (Norway), a story by Pierre Barbet (France) with a good style and a terrible idea, an excellent new wave style story by Bringsvaerd (Norway) and an astonishingly well done tale of auto traffic paranoia by the Spanish writer Domingo Santos (I would have expected that last story to have been written by an author from France or Italy).

And possibly the best story in the book is "The King and the Dollmaker" by Wolfgang Jeschke of Germany, a dizzyingly complex story.

I have a feeling that some of the stories here just didn't translate well, and I also get the impression that many of the authors have a less than perfect understanding of the hard sciences, but there are enough good stories here that this anthology is well worth looking into.

-Doug Fratz

THE WORLD SWAPPERS by John Brunner (Ace, 1976, \$1.25)

There are at least two John Brunners. One writes massive dystopian novels like Stand on Zanzibar, The Jagged Orbit, and The Sheep Look Up. Another, not so active these days, produced fast-moving adventure sf that didn't insult the reader's intelligence.

The World Swappers is a product of the second Brunner. Considering the facts that the copyright date (the only date Ace put on the book) is 1959, and that there are only 156 pages of fairly large type, this probably started existence as half of an Ace double, and the double's demand for constant action shows in the plot.

Bassett, an industrialist and importer, wants to rule the galaxy. Counce, founder and leader of a secret organization dedicated to helping humanity, wants to stop him. Bassett wants to solve the population problem on Earth by moving Earth's excess to the currently closed colonial worlds, after which the grateful millions should give him power. Counce knows it won't work.

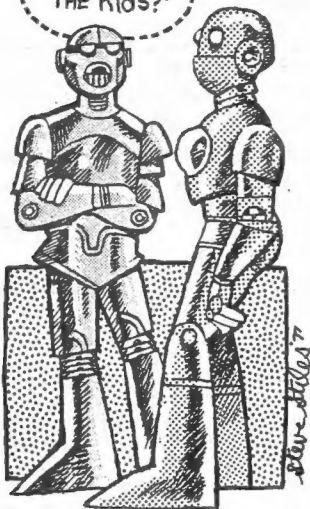
Anty Dreean, member of Counce's organization, discovers the first alien artifacts. The Others are coming closer.

That's the first three chapters. The next sixteen chapters include a couple of abductions (of the same girl), first contact and a battle with the Others (whose spaceship is snatched from the sky with a matter transmitter), an entire planet blackmailed into evacuation, the evolution of Counce and Bassett into archetypes and the decision of Counce to kill Bassett (apparently at the cost of his own life), the replacement of an old genius with a new one, and a negotiation of amity with the Others.

Brunner keeps all these balls in the air without apparent strain. He shows none of the stylistic pyrotechnics of Stand on Zanzibar, but tells his story solidly and well.

Even when he feels the need to use the "if only he'd

WHAT DO YOU
MEAN, "HOW'S
THE KIDS?"



use his genius for the good of mankind' schtick, Brunner does it well and without embarrassment.

'Counce's eyes seemed to cloud over, as though he were looking at a memory. "It seems to me, Wu---without wishing to be conceited---that in essence there are two human beings. Archetypes, if you like. I'm one. Bassett is the other."

"Do you know, I was just about his age when I stumbled across the transfax? Bassett is brilliant. So was I, in a different field. But we think differently. We both plan, take thought for the consequences of our actions, but our motives are parsecs apart.

(...)

"Maybe if Bassett had been in the same situation as I was, if he'd seen he had the chance of not just one lifetime, but many lifetimes, to work out his plans, he would have done as I did. But I can't really believe that. He wouldn't have given a damn for the fact that the Ymirans were living under conditions unfit for any decent person, if it hadn't happened to provide him with a means of implementing his plans for himself." (139-140)

The book is worth reading not only for its own sake, but also as a counterbalance to the effects of Brunner's skillful pessimism. When he tries optimism, he does very well at it indeed.

In sum, *The World Swappers* is a minor work by a major writer, worth reading and worth owning. A library should probably get a couple of copies if Brunner is at all popular.

-- Alan Winston.

DIADEM FROM THE STARS by Jo Clayton (DAW, 1977, \$1.50)

This is the story of a young girl on a backward planet and her quest to follow the vague instructions left by her offworld mother and find her destiny in the stars. It is a rather well done version of the standard young-person-matures-science-fantasy-adventure story.

Clayton's lead character, Aleytys, has much of the feel of Ann McCaffrey's Dragon series characters, but Clayton has not yet developed McCaffrey's clear and easy to follow narrative style. The beginning of the novel is almost impossible to read. New words are thrown in without any information necessary to grasp their full meanings. Dialog like, "'The shura' have called a mulaqat in the finjan Topaz'" are totally meaningless.

But the narrative does pick up, and the book soon turns into a rather interesting story.

The story ends with Aleytys finally leaving the planet,

with the plot, really, in mid stride, so I take it a sequel is planned. I look forward to it. Jo Clayton is already a very good story developer, and if she can clean up her narrative, promises to be an excellent story teller.

-Doug Fratz

AND STRANGE AT ECBATAN THE TREES by Michael Bishop (Harper & Row, 1976, \$7.95)

Michael Bishop first came to my attention in 1974 when he had two brilliant novellas, "The White Otters of Childhood" and "Death and Designation Among The Asadi" on the final Hugo ballot. I'm sure either of them would have won if the author had been savvy enough to withdraw one in favor of the other and not compete with himself, but in any case they marked his arrival as a major writer, which would mean a new novel by him is a major event. Correct?

Alas, no. This one is decidedly inferior to either of the above mentioned, and it is a very minor event. I am disappointed, to say the least.

The major problem is that the setting and point of view (of a first person narrator) are totally unconvincing. We have an island kingdom on a planet 800 light-years distant, where mankind has been divided into two subspecies, one docile and nearly emotionless, and a smaller ruling class which is more aggressive but not really creative. The time is twelve centuries hence. You'd think that after all that (and with an apparent near destruction of the Earth in the past, plus the exile of mankind by a newly arisen third species) the culture of these people would be vastly different from what we know today, but it isn't. We see little of it to begin with, and what few glimpses we get are notable for their familiarity. It's more Renaissance Europe than the far future. At times one suspects it's England, circa 1588, and the head of state, Our Shathra Anna (first two words, her title, & we never know what "Shathra" means) is really Elizabeth, Gabriel Elk, resident poetic genius is really Shakespeare, and Chancellor Blaine (who does not approve of the arts) a Puritan and budding proto-Cromwell. The invading seafarers could very easily be the Spanish Armada.

Bishop's use of detail is very poor. A first person narrator native to so distant a time and place would certainly make all sorts of offhand references to persons, events, works of literature, etc. dating between his era and ours, and a skillful writer can exploit this to make his world come alive and assume a place in history. Robert Heinlein, in his earlier days, was a master of this sort of hint-dropping, and Sprague de Camp is equally good at giving an imaginary world a literature for the characters to quote and base their thinking upon. Bishop would do well to study the works of those two gentlemen, because to hear him tell it, the next 12,000 years in his universe are a total cultural blank. About the only writer mentioned is Socrates, but would anyone but an archeologist be familiar with him by then? (Or able to understand him?) And on page 17 a gate has "old Spanish scrollwork in iron" Would this really be recognized by our not too educated narrator, any more than a man on the street today would know ancient Etruscan architecture at a glance? The fauna of the planet are equally fake. On page 78 there are "shark-like creatures" Who would know what a shark is unless they were imported from Earth, and who would bother with that? (There is no contact between this world and Earth, by the way, so I doubt our hero saw the latest remake of Jaws.)

The technology, like the social structure, doesn't make you believe for an instant this is really a far planet in the future. Again it's more 17th Century, and yet, jarringly, the local genius whips up a laser destructo-beam just when he needs it. Could this be done in a horse and buggy culture? Granted, the knowledge is present in ancient books, but high technology needs high technology to perpetuate itself. You have to be able to build the parts, assemble it, and have the materials prepared to begin with. What good 'n electric lamp if

body has invented the wall socket yet?

The plot and characters could be interesting, but they're not. The most promising parts of the book are those dealing with Gabriel Elk's theatre of the dead -- literally that; live acting is taboo, so he reanimates corpses, again with technology far beyond that of the rest of the world. There is a certain strange beauty in the idea, and a great deal of emotional potential, but all this is only brushed over. Bishop is trying to explore the reason for art in the face of more pressing problems, like the invasion, but it doesn't work. He has violated the old H.G. Wells principle of one marvel per story. In short, if pigs fly over hedges at you, that's an unusual thing, and the basis for a story. But if it later turns out that horses, cows, and bicycles can do it, no one is interested. To modernize and transfer to an otherworldly setting, even if the landscape is fantastic and imaginary, its home to the characters. The plot should derive from an element, or marvel, which is unusual to them. Bishop has made the mistake of having two (and a half -- a legendary sea monster which crops up at the end, apparently an artificial thing designed to prevent everybody from knowing What Man Is Not Meant To Know) premises in a very short book and the clash, each drawing away the attention from the other until neither is sufficiently handled. This should have been either a story about corpse-actors or building a forbidden weapon to stop the invasion, not both. (And for the latter, I might suggest that Elk's supposed "guilt" over having zapped a few hundred badguys and saved his country from utter destruction is idealistic posturing, not a real moral dilemma.)

Finally, the writing itself isn't all that good. Aside from the clumsy incidentals, there are names which are real tongue-twisters (Mansuecacia, Ongladred, Angromain Archipelagoes) which are only partially offset by some very nice compounds (Windfall Last, Stonelore), and occasional murky phrases suggest the author's ear is a little bit out of tune today.

Bishop in an off moment. Important only as a minor episode in what may well turn out to be a very major career.

-- Darrell Schweitzer.

THE BICENTENNIAL MAN AND OTHER STORIES by Isaac Asimov
(Doubleday, 1976, \$7.95)

This is Asimov's newest short story collection, most of the stories being written in the last few years. It is a grabbag mixture of stories, some good, some bad. Isaac is at his best when amusing, light and clever in these stories. The lead story is supposed to be the blockbuster of the collection, but I thought it fell flat.

"The Bicentennial Man" is about a robot who wants to be a "man". For me, it just didn't work emotionally. By the end of the story he has been rewarded with virtually all the assets of being a man, except an official ruling from the world legislature saying so. He even has many close friends, and yet, he sees it as short of his goal and chooses death. The only human goal I got the feeling he was striving for by that was insanity.

-Doug Fratz

BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES OF THE YEAR, edited by Lester del Rey (Dutton, 1976, \$10.75)

Lester del Rey's fifth annual "Best of the Year" collection could more fittingly be titled "del Rey's Best" since it's made up -- for better or worse -- of the editor's personal favorites. "Objective" evaluation tools -- such as readers' polls, circulation figures, or fan response -- probably did not enter into these selections. The whole kit'n' kaboodle forms Mr. del Rey's ideas of what constitutes the "best" science fiction.

The key questions are, of course: What are del Rey's credentials in this area? What makes him fit to judge? Even more importantly, does he represent the tastes of the average SF reader?

Let's try to answer those questions. On the issue of credentials, del Rey has nothing to hide. He is author of more than thirty-five novels, a bundle of short stories, and a multitude of articles in the field of SF. He is certainly well-qualified to judge an area he's made a living at, especially considering how tenuous that professional arena can be. In addition, del Rey has written major works of literary merit. His novel, *Pstalemate*, was elected as a Notable Book of the Year in 1971, and he has other books being reprinted.

On the question of being a fair representative, it's clear that again del Rey scores points. He was book reviewer for IF for several years, and actually helped to form the public's tastes. His column, "Reading Room," was regarded by the general reader as an intimate guide to the field.

This fifth annual collection, edited by Lester del Rey, is made up of the editor's favorites. The stories selected here are by the cream of science fiction writers: Clifford Simak, Poul Anderson, Robert Hoskins, and many others.

In Simak's story, "Senior Citizen," a prisoner of old age and recycling is forced to eat old clothes and bodily wastes to survive.

In "Mail Supremacy," there's a wild postal predicament: out-of-state mail is delivered to other galaxies faster than in-town deliveries.

Phyllis Eisenstein's "Tree of Life" dramatically shows how indomitable life is, especially when an alien employs intricate methods to find its perfect "tree-host."

The stories picked here are certainly fun to read, but not classics. Still, they are of interest and recommended reading.

—John DiPrete

THE TOWERS OF UTOPIA by Mack Reynolds (Bantam, 1975, \$1.50)

The novel takes place in a super-apartment building in the year 2000. It is a badly written book.

There isn't really much plot, just a lot of rather pedestrian problems encountered by the people who run the huge apartment building. The main characters are lackluster and the supporting characters are ludicrous. They are constantly explaining things to each other that they should already know. It's ridiculous. They're all self-conscious that they're science fiction characters.

It's a "Frederik Pohl Selection". Mack and Fred both made a mistake on this one.

-Doug Fratz



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